Social Care in a Modernizing Welfare State: The Impact of Social Workers' Role Conceptions on Client-Tailoring
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Master Thesis

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Public Administration – International and European Governance

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by

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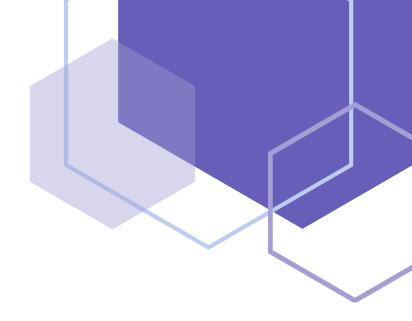
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Before you lies the thesis 'Social Care in a Modernizing Welfare State: The Impact of Social Workers' Role Conceptions on Client-Tailoring'. This research aims to explain how social workers' role conceptions affect the manner in which they define and pursue client-tailoring when delivering social care services. This research has been conducted to write this thesis, which serves as a fulfilment to the requirements of completing the Master's Programme Public Administration – International and European Governance at Leiden University.

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Abstract

Like many other European welfare states, the Netherlands decentralized its social care policy towards Dutch municipalities, to enhance client-tailored approaches within the delivery of social care services. As a result, social workers working for municipalities are now in charge of freely interpreting and engaging in client-tailoring in a manner they deem best for their cases. Given that social workers inhabit various role conceptions, this research focuses on how social workers' role conceptions impact the manner in which they define and pursue client-tailoring. To analyse this, this qualitative research conducted twelve in-depth interviews with Dutch social workers from different municipalities and social care domains: income and employment reintegration processes, long-term care, youth care and social assistance. The data-analysis, and results and findings of this study show how inhabiting various role conceptions affect how client-tailoring is defined and pursued.

Keywords: Client-tailoring, role conceptions, social workers, social care services, municipalities

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1.Introduction

Many European countries, like Spain and the United Kingdom have implemented decentralization within their social care policy (Deusdad, Javornik, Giralt & Marbán-Flores, 2017; Yeandle, 2016). Due to decentralization, the responsibility for providing social care services has shifted from the national government to more localized authorities, like municipalities (Kazepov, 2010). A major reform like this one can also be observed in the Netherlands. In 2015, the Dutch national government introduced a new Social Support Act through which social care policies were decentralized to Dutch municipalities (CPB, 2013; Tonkens & Duyvendak, 2018). Because of the decentralization, Dutch municipalities are now in charge of the development and service delivery of social care services, which include income and employment reintegration processes, long-term care, youth care and social assistance (VNG,2013; Jansen, Javornik, Bummel & Yerkes, 2021).

The Dutch national government decentralized the social care policy to enhance and provide a more client-tailored approach when delivering social care services to citizens (VNG, 2013; Pommer & Boelhouwer, 2017; Trommel & Boutellier, 2018). Given the classical top-down hierarchy of bureaucracies, municipalities but more specifically its social workers operate at the lowest levels and have a direct connection with citizens, as compared to the national government which mainly operates on a higher and more distanced level from citizens (Lipsky, 1980; Weber, 1978). For this reason, the Dutch national government decentralized its social care policy as social workers working in municipalities are more capable of providing client-tailored social care services (Trommel & Boutellier, 2018; VNG, 2013).

1.1 Client-Tailoring, Discretionary Room and Role Conceptions

In implementing decentralization within the Dutch social care policy, client-tailoring has become a crucial objective in developing and implementing social care policies regarding employment reintegration processes, long-term care, youth care and social assistance (CPB, 2013; VNG, 2013). Client-tailoring refers to how street-level bureaucrats, such as social workers, provide more personalised services to their clients, instead of only implementing laws and regulations (King & Cotterill, 2007). Street-level bureaucrats engage in client-tailoring when helping their clients to provide services and advice, which are more catered towards the needs of their clients (Homburg, Dijkshoorn & Thaens, 2014; King & Cotterill, 2007; Pieterson, Ebbers & Van Dijk, 2007). Due to decentralization, the Dutch national government has given municipalities the opportunity to

develop their own manner of client-tailoring when delivering social care services (CPB, 2013, VNG, 2013). This means that instead of adhering to strict rules and regulations regarding client-tailoring, social workers working in municipalities are free to interpret and pursue client-tailoring in a manner they deem fit for their citizen-clients (VNG, 2013).

In the classical perspective on bureaucracies however, social workers are considered street-level bureaucrats who act as mere operators representing the government in the eyes of its citizens (Bartels, 2013; Weber, 1978; Zacka, 2017). Street-level bureaucrats are expected to apply and implement policies, which are generated to help and serve citizens (Bartels, 2013; Lipsky, 1980; Weber, 1978; Zacka, 2017). Nevertheless, laws and policies tend to be broadly formulated, which leads to ambiguity and obscurity when encountering specific client issues (Raaphorst, 2021, Zacka, 2017). Seeing as not every policy tends to be perfectly applicable to all individual cases and circumstances, street-level bureaucrats possess a level of discretionary room to interpret and balance general rules and policies upon encountering complex situations within their client cases (Lipsky, 1980; Rutz, Mathew, Robben & Bont, 2017).

Street-level bureaucrats' discretionary room revolves around their prerogative to follow or deviate from policies when providing services for clients (Hupe & Buffat, 2014; Lu, Xu & Wang, 2021). This indicates that discretionary room allows street-level bureaucrats to exert a level of morality. As a result, street-level bureaucrats often unknowingly tend to take on role conceptions based on the values they deem important in their day-to-day work (Zhang, Yang, Walker & Wang, 2020; Zacka, 2017). Street-level bureaucrats are free to inhabit and interpret their role in many ways. While there are several role conceptions street-level bureaucrats could inhabit, this research focusses on three of such role conceptions: the Indifferent, the Caregiver and the Enforcer (Zacka, 2017). Each of these role conceptions corresponds to a value, which street-level bureaucrats deem most important in their work. The Indifferent bureaucrat mostly adheres to values of efficiency, the Caregiving bureaucrat values the notion of responsiveness highly, and the Enforcing bureaucrat strongly believes in the notion of fairness (Zacka, 2017). Taking these three roles into account, it is not necessary for street-level bureaucrats to affiliate with just one of these values, and thus role conceptions. Street-level bureaucrats could also embrace two or more of these values, meaning that one street-level bureaucrat inhabits two or more different role conceptions.

Due to the decentralization of the Dutch social care policy, Dutch social workers working in municipalities are free to define and pursue client-tailoring in a manner they deem fit for their clients (VNG, 2013). However, seeing as social workers are street-level bureaucrats, social workers' interpretation and engagement in client-tailoring may differ from each other, even for social workers working within the same municipality. This is because each social worker may inhabit different role conceptions based on the corresponding values a social worker believes in. Given the growing importance of client-tailoring in the context of decentralization within the Dutch social care policy, it is yet to be discovered how social workers' role conceptions affect the way they define and pursue client-tailoring. It is this unexplored relation which creates room to conduct this study's research.

1.2 Research Questions and Sub-Questions

Client-tailoring is a crucial objective within the decentralization process of the Dutch social care policy (VNG, 2013). Seeing as the Dutch national government has not formulated strict rules and regulations on how to pursue client-tailoring, social workers working in municipalities are free to interpret and engage in client-tailoring in an approach they believe suits their client-cases best (VNG, 2013). Every social worker, however, may inhabit different role conceptions, like the Indifferent, the Caregiver and the Enforcer, which each correspond to a specific value (Zacka, 2017). Given that social workers are free to interpret and engage in client-tailoring, it is yet unknown how their role conceptions impact the manner in which they define and pursue client-tailoring. To gain a better understanding of this dynamic, this study outlines the following main research question:

How do social workers' role conceptions affect how they define and pursue client-tailoring?

The three chosen role conceptions and client-tailoring are the key concepts of the main research question, and provide a multi-layered nature to the research question, which creates complexity. To reduce such complexity, this study outlines the following sub-questions which will support the main research question and help in analysing and answering it.

1. *What role conceptions can be recognized in the manner in which social workers operate, given the corresponding values they believe in?*
2. *How do social workers define and pursue client-tailoring?*

1.3 Practical Relevance

Analysing and answering this research question is of practical relevance. This research will elaborate on which role conceptions social workers working in municipalities affiliate themselves with, depending on what corresponding values they believe in. Based on that, this study will then research how social workers define and pursue client-tailoring. This study will thus provide new and fresh perspectives on how social workers' role conceptions impact the manner in which they interpret and engage in client-tailoring. Moreover, in recent decades client-tailoring has become increasingly important in different public policy domains, like social care services (Lymbery, 2012). This research will contribute by exploring and explaining individual social workers' motivations for engaging in client-tailoring.

By elaborating on these new perspectives, policymakers and management in top-levels of bureaucracies will gain helpful insights into understanding the significance of social workers' discretionary judgements. By presenting the new perspectives, policymakers and top-level bureaucratic management will gain a more in-depth understanding of the differences in which various social workers operate, given their affiliation with several role conceptions and their individual perceptions on client-tailoring. This is essential as this dynamic impacts how laws and policies are applied and implemented on the lowest levels of bureaucracies. The new insights will enable policymakers and top-level management within bureaucracies to acknowledge and comprehend the daily operations and aimed values of different social workers. In this way, policymakers and top-level management will be capable of including the new perspectives into their policies and rules more thoroughly, which is crucial as laws and policies are generated to serve citizens.

1.4 Scientific Relevance

Apart from practical relevance, this study also aims to be of scientific relevance. Existing research mostly focuses on the importance of discretionary room for different street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980; Taylor, 2007). It also sheds lights on moral agency within street-level bureaucrats' discretionary judgements, as well as the importance of values in the daily tasks of street-level bureaucrats. Based on such values, literature is expanded into various role conceptions street-level bureaucrats may inhabit and what values they believe in, as well as the influence on decision-making and behaviour within public policy domains (De Graaf, 2011; Kampen & Tonkens, 2018; Paanakker, 2019; 2021; Zacka, 2017). Furthermore, existing research on client-tailoring mostly

focuses on what client-tailoring in public policy means and if street-level bureaucrats should engage in it (Forde & Lynch, 2013; Lymbery, 2012). Other existing research on client-tailoring focusses on differences between the private and the public sector in how they provide personalised services to their clients (Homburg, Dijkshoorn & Thaens, 2014; King & Cotterill, 2007).

Despite the existing research, lesser research is available on how social workers' role conceptions (which could be more than one, based on the corresponding values they believe in), influence their interpretation of and engagement with client-tailoring when interacting with clients. By analysing the main research question, this study aims to contribute to existing scientific knowledge within public administration by providing new perspectives and understandings regarding the impact of inhabited role conceptions on the definition and engagement with client-tailoring.

1.5 Thesis Outline

This research is divided into five sections and is organized as follows. The next section, section 2, provides a theoretical framework consisting of relevant theories and literature. This theoretical framework will help in understanding the underlying knowledge of the main research question and its key concepts. Section 3 then outlines this study's methodology by explaining the research design, data collection and data-analysis. Section 4 presents the empirical findings which resulted from the conducted data-analysis. This section provides in-depth answers to the presented sub-questions. Section 5 concludes this study by answering the main research question. This section presents a discussion of the findings, and the strengths and limitations of the research. Suggestions for possible future research will also be proposed in this section. Lastly, the section on references presents the sources used for this research, and the Appendix section provides more information on the data collection and analysis of this study.

2. Theoretical Framework

The following section presents a theoretical framework by explaining relevant theories regarding, among other things, the key concepts of the main research question. The first part of this section provides a deeper insight into the significance of discretionary room for street-level bureaucrats. The second part of this section continues by disclosing various role conceptions. The third part of this section then presents the three different role conceptions for street-level bureaucrats this study chose to focus on: the Indifferent, the Caregiver and the Enforcer. The fourth part of this section elaborates on theories regarding client-tailoring in general, and client-tailoring in the context of the decentralized Dutch social care policy. The fifth part, and thus final part of this section provides some generic expectations on this study's research.

2.1 Discretionary Room

As introduced earlier, the Dutch national government decentralized its social care policy, regarding income and employment reintegration processes, long-term care, youth care and social assistance (CPB, 2013). Because of the implementation and objectives of decentralization, social workers working for Dutch municipalities are now in charge of interpreting and engaging in client-tailoring when delivering social care services (VNG, 2013). Social workers are considered street-level bureaucrats (Ellis, 2011; Kallio & Kouvo, 2015). According to Weber's ideal-type of a bureaucracy, street-level bureaucrats operate on the lowest levels of bureaucracies and share a direct connection with citizens (Kallio & Kouvo, 2015; Taylor, 2007; Weber, 1978). Following this ideal-type, street-level bureaucrats are expected to ensure citizens' compliance with the bureaucracy's rules and policies, which are developed by the higher levels in the top-down structure of bureaucracies (Bartels, 2013; Lipsky, 1980). Compared to street-level bureaucrats, higher bureaucratic management levels share a rather distant connection with citizens (Weber, 1978).

While public rules and policies are created keeping more general citizen-like circumstances in mind, implementing those rules and policies in practice can often turn out to be challenging (Ellis, 2011). This is because not all broadly formulated public rules and policies apply proportionately to every citizen's specific circumstance (Bartels, 2013; Lipsky, 1980). Public rules and policies often consist of ambiguity and are intentionally created in that manner to provide street-level bureaucrats the opportunity to interpret public rules and policies, and cater towards

the specific cases they come across (Lipsky, 1980; Matland, 1995; Raaphorst, 2021). To do so, street-level bureaucrats possess discretion which not only grants them the opportunity to interpret laws and policies, but it also allows them to exercise discretionary judgements on citizens' specific issues (Lipsky, 1980; Rutz, Mathew, Robben & Bont, 2017). Moreover, when helping clients, street-level bureaucrats can choose to follow or diverge from rules and policies, due to their discretion (Hupe & Buffat, 2014; Lu, Xu & Wang, 2021). In this manner, discretionary room prevents complexities in the day-to-day tasks of street-level bureaucrats, such as social workers, whenever they are expected to implement ambiguously formulated public rules and policies (Lipsky, 1980; Matland, 1995).

2.2 Inhabiting Role Conceptions

As public rules and policies do not always cover the complexities of reality, street-level bureaucrats must use their discretionary room to cater towards the specific cases they encounter (Kampen & Tonkens, 2018; Zacka, 2017). This indicates that street-level bureaucrats' discretionary room forces them to act morally when making discretionary judgements (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000; Taylor, 2007; Zhang, Yang, Walker & Wang, 2020). In doing so, several individual street-level bureaucrats, often unknowingly, inhabit various role conceptions when interacting with clients (De Graaf, 2011; Paanakker 2019; Selden, Brewer & Brudney, 1975; Zacka, 2017).

Different role conceptions focus on different aspects of street-level bureaucrats' jobs. Some role conceptions focus on the tasks and responsibilities street-level bureaucrats are expected to carry out. For example, public administrators, like street-level bureaucrats often inhabit roles which are related to values and attitudes that are affiliated with their occupations (De Graaf, 2011). Street-level bureaucrats could take on an *administrative role*, a role described as "a cohesive set of job-related values and attitudes that provides the public administrator a stable set of expectations about his or her responsibilities" (Selden, Brewer & Brudney, 1975, as mentioned in De Graaf, 2011). This type of role conception mostly looks at the role of the street-level bureaucrats from the perspective of their job-description and responsibilities. Other role conceptions look at the manner in which street-level bureaucrats conduct bureaucratic behaviour upon encountering dilemmas, and how they use their discretionary room in such situations (O'Kelly & Dubnick, 2005; Suleiman, 2003). Examples of such role conceptions include: *the intuitive, the strategic, the blameworthy, the adaptive, the just, the rational, the virtuous, the reflexive, and the moralist bureaucrat* (O'Kelly & Dubnick, 2005). These role conceptions elaborate

on how street-level bureaucrats behave and take decisions using their discretionary room when facing complexities.

The previous paragraphs presented various role conceptions which concentrated on street-level workers. Nevertheless, many of those role conceptions will not sufficiently be able to analyse the main research question of this study. This is because these role conceptions describe the rather administrative or behavioural or decision-making aspects of street-level work. Given that the central case of this study focusses on the decentralization of the Dutch social care policy and how individual social workers, as a result, define and pursue client-tailoring, it is essential to look at role conceptions which greatly focus on street-level bureaucrats' connection with citizens. For this reason, this study chooses to focus on the following three role conceptions.

2.3 Three Role Conceptions: the Indifferent, the Caregiver and the Enforcer

In his work, Zacka (2017) distinguishes between three role conceptions street-level bureaucrats could inhabit: *the Indifferent, the Caregiver and the Enforcer*. Each of the three role conceptions correspond to a certain value (Zacka, 2017). The Indifferent bureaucrat mostly adheres to the value of *efficiency*, the Caregiving bureaucrat highly values the notion of *responsiveness*, and the Enforcing bureaucrat strongly believes in the notion of *fairness* (Zacka, 2017). The fact that each role conception corresponds to a specific value is crucial, as it emphasizes the main differences across the three role conceptions when stressing street-level bureaucrats' direct connection and interactions with citizens (Zacka, 2017). The corresponding values indicate what street-level bureaucrats find important in their work, which then leads to suitable role conceptions. Even though Zacka (2017) distinguishes between the three role conceptions, it is not necessary for street-level bureaucrats to affiliate with only one of these values. Street-level bureaucrats could also adhere to two or more of these values, which in turn implies that an individual street-level bureaucrat could also inhabit two or more different role conceptions at the same time. The following parts will elaborate on each role conception separately.

2.3.1 The Indifferent

Zacka (2017) outlines three specific role conceptions, yet these role conceptions are generated by building on earlier literature regarding street-level bureaucrats' role conceptions. An example of this is the narrative of the *state-agent* (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000; 2003). The narrative of the state-agent focuses on street-level bureaucrats' duty to implement public rules and policies when managing client-cases (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000). Furthermore, street-level

bureaucrats who consider themselves state agents perceive discretionary room as helpful in the sense that it eases street-level bureaucrats' work. State agents base their discretionary judgements on the correctness of public rules and policies (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000). The narrative of the state-agent thus revolves around the abidance to public rules and policies (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003).

Zacka's (2017) role conception of the *Indifferent* coincides with the narrative of the state-agent. Much like the state-agent, the indifferent bureaucrat focuses on the idea of impartiality and refrains from getting personally involved with its clients (Zacka, 2017). Since the indifferent perceives itself as a mere civil servant, they aim to behave in a person-neutral manner. This implies that the indifferent bureaucrat sets aside its own beliefs and relationships to prevent its personal life from interfering with its professional responsibilities as an agent of the state (Kampen & Tonkens, 2018; Zacka, 2017). In this way, the indifferent bureaucrat avoids differentiating between its clients based on its own personal interests or opinions. Furthermore, apart from ensuring equal treatment between its clients, the indifferent bureaucrat also strives towards person-neutrality to protect its clients from civil servants' misuse of power (Kampen & Tonkens, 2018; Zacka, 2017). Because of person-neutrality, the indifferent bureaucrat is able to refuse getting entangled in its clients' issues. This type of withdrawal approach causes the indifferent bureaucrat to be able to process client-cases more rapidly and consider economical aspects. In this way, the indifferent bureaucrat becomes more efficient, and thus strongly believes in the value of *efficiency* (Zacka, 2017).

Furthermore, because of its withdrawal approach to client-cases, the indifferent bureaucrat prevents its work from becoming emotionally draining, which could cause the bureaucrat psychological disadvantages like a burn-out (Kampen & Tonkens, 2018; Zacka, 2017). Nevertheless, the indifferent bureaucrat's withdrawal approach may not always be beneficial for its clients. The indifferent's excessive focus on person-neutrality, and thus only citizens' compliance with rules, may cause the indifferent to neglect whether certain rules and decisions fit its clients' ethically charged issues.

2.3.2 The Caregiver

While the indifferent bureaucrat may consider too much involvement in their clients' cases to be emotionally draining, the *Caregiver* feels otherwise. The caregiving bureaucrat interacts with its clients in a more attentive manner (Kampen & Tonkens, 2018; Zacka, 2017). As mentioned earlier,

Zacka's (2017) role conceptions are generated by building on earlier literature regarding street-level bureaucrats' role conceptions. Zacka's (2017) role conception of the *Caregiver* shares similar characteristics with the narrative of the *citizen-agent* (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000). The citizen-agent focuses on normative abidance, meaning that citizen-agents act in response to individual clients and specific cases (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000; 2003).

Much like the citizen-agent, the caregiver responds to the individual circumstance of its clients, and thus takes rather normative discretionary judgments, instead of merely abiding by public rules and policies like the indifferent bureaucrat does (Zacka, 2017). The caregiver often tends to take on the role of caregiving when its clients are feeling lost. By taking on the role of a caregiver, a bureaucrat can guide its clients through the formal procedures of bureaucracies (Zacka, 2017). The caregiver tries to be attentive by understanding and sympathizing with its client's issues (Kampen & Tonkens, 2018; Zacka, 2017). In this way, the caregiver is able to cater towards the needs of its client. Unlike the indifferent bureaucrat, the caregiver adheres to the value of *responsiveness*, and thus focuses on providing a sense of responsiveness towards its clients (Zacka, 2017).

Nevertheless, there are also concerns that arise with the role of a caregiver. Firstly, being responsive towards individual clients can be emotionally draining. More importantly, a caregiver will not be able to provide all of its clients with an equal amount of commitment (Zacka, 2017). At some point a caregiver will have to differentiate between client-cases which require more responsiveness and client-cases which can be processed more easily. In this way, caregiving can create discrimination between client-cases (Kampen & Tonkens, 2018; Zacka, 2017).

2.3.3 The Enforcer

Building on existing theories regarding street-level bureaucrats' role conceptions, Zacka's role conception of the *Enforcer* also shares some similarities with the narrative of the citizen-agent. As mentioned earlier, citizen-agents base their discretionary judgements on normative decisions, rather than the correctness of policies (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000; 2003). Citizen-agents do so by closely paying attention to who is deserving and who is not, meaning that citizen-agents identify and select worthy clients (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003).

Quite like the citizen-agent, the enforcer also pays attention to the notion of deservingness (Zacka, 2017). The enforcer likes to distinguish between clients who are in actual need of

assistance, and clients who misuse their rights of gaining benefits and guidance. The enforcer distinguishes between its clients due to its strong belief in the value of *fairness* (Zacka, 2017). Similar to the indifferent, the enforcer intends to ensure citizens' compliance with laws and policies. However, unlike the indifferent, the enforcer also feels the need to protect the spirit of those laws and policies by acting on fairness; only providing help and resources to those who genuinely need it by focussing on the possibility of encountering frauds (Zacka, 2017). Due to such differentiation between client-cases, the enforcer gets more personally acquainted with its clients. Unlike the caregiver nonetheless, the enforcer is able to control the extent of personal involvement with its clients (Zacka, 2017). This is essential as the enforcer also wants to fulfil its responsibilities as a public official. This aim of acting as a public official resembles the earlier mentioned narrative of the state-agent, which revolves around the abiding to the principles of public rules and policies (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000; 2003).

Nonetheless, while the enforcer aims to focus on the value of fairness, it also brings about concerns. Due to the enforcer's tendency to distinguish between client-cases, an enforcer will be suspicious of its clients (Zacka, 2017). Such suspicion may negatively impact those clients who are already experiencing disadvantaged situations in their personal lives. In this way, a lack of trust is created in the direct connection between street-level bureaucrats and clients (Kampen & Tonkens, 2018; Zacka, 2017).

2.4 Client-Tailoring

So far, this study has elaborated on the significance of discretionary room in street-level work. It has also outlined what role conceptions street-level bureaucrats could inhabit, and which role conceptions this study chooses to focus on. To return to our main case, the Dutch national government decentralized its social care policy and services to Dutch municipalities (CPB, 2013; VNG, 2013). This reform was implemented to provide citizens with a client-tailored approach when delivering social care services (Pommer & Boelhouwer, 2017; Trommel & Boutellier, 2018). To achieve this, the Dutch national government refrained from generating strict and concise laws, processes and policies on how to engage in client-tailoring (VNG, 2013). In doing so, social workers working in municipalities are now responsible for interpreting and pursuing client-tailoring in the manner they consider best. Client-tailoring thus poses as a crucial point in the major decentralization reform of the Dutch social care policy.

Client-tailoring, however, is not a brand-new concept. Existing literature on client-tailoring defines this concept as the manner in which street-level bureaucrats cater towards the needs of individual clients, instead of solely applying public rules and policies and providing merely traditional services (Homburg, Dijkshoorn & Thaens, 2014; King & Cotterill, 2007; Pieterson, Ebbers & Van Dijk, 2007). When engaging in client-tailoring, street-level bureaucrats deliver specific services and concise advice, which they feel responds best to their clients' particular circumstances (King & Cotterill, 2007). Because of this, client-tailoring offers street-level bureaucrats' bureaucratic jurisdictions with greater flexibility to make choices and have control over provided services (Stevens, et al., 2018). Client-tailoring thus coincides and works well with the discretion street-level bureaucrats possess. The discretionary room is used to follow or diverge from intentional ambiguously formulated public rules and policies, which grant street-level bureaucrats room to interpret and apply such rules and policies befittingly to specific client-cases (Hupe & Buffat, 2014; Lipsky, 1980; Lu, Xu & Wang, 2021; Matland, 1995; Raaphorst, 2021).

2.4.1 Client-Tailoring and Discretionary Room

Like discretion, client-tailoring also provides street-level bureaucrats with room to cater to the needs of client-cases (King & Cotterill, 2007). Nevertheless, discretionary room and client-tailoring also differ from each other. With the use of discretion, street-level bureaucrats are allowed to interpret laws, and decide and exercise discretionary judgements on clients (Lipsky, 1980). Client-tailoring on the other hand, focuses greatly on cooperation between street-level bureaucrats and clients (Ferguson, 2012). This entails that, apart from street-level bureaucrats, individual clients must also engage in client-tailoring by adopting some level of responsibility themselves to also make progress independently in their particular circumstances (Ferguson, 2012).

It is essential for clients to engage in client-tailoring, since street-level bureaucrats try to incorporate clear and effective communication into their manner of engaging in client-tailoring (King & Cotterill, 2007; Smith, 2011). Through clear and effective communication, street-level bureaucrats try to exceed their duty of acting as informants who solely provide their clients with an overall knowledge of citizens' rights and services (Smith, 2011). Clear and effective communication is used to ensure that street-level bureaucrats and their clients are on the same page regarding clients' specific issues, as well as how the street-level bureaucrat will cater towards the needs of the clients (King & Cotterill, 2007; Smith, 2011; Stevens, et al., 2018). Thus,

clients' engagement in client-tailoring and willingness to cooperate with street-level bureaucrats also matters, as it impacts the progress of the clients' particular cases (Stevens, et al., 2018).

2.4.2 Client-Tailoring in the context of the Dutch Social Care Policy

As outlined above, the existing literature mostly defines client-tailoring in terms of catering towards the needs of clients, and actions revolving around responsiveness. This definition of client-tailoring resembles Zacka's (2017) role conception of the *Caregiver* to a great extent. Nevertheless, in the context of the Dutch social care policy, this definition of client-tailoring can be questioned.

As a result of the fact that the Dutch national government decentralized its social care policies, client-tailoring has become increasingly important (VNG, 2013). The definition and manner of pursuing client-tailoring is intentionally left vague so that municipalities, but more specifically their social workers are free to interpret and engage in client-tailoring in approaches they deem fit for their client-cases (CPB,2013; VNG, 2013). Given that social workers are street-level bureaucrats, social workers could adhere to one or more values, which correspond to one or more of the three chosen role conceptions (Weber, 1978; Zacka, 2017). The three role conceptions correspond to specific values of *efficiency, responsiveness, and fairness*, and revolve around what street-level bureaucrats, like social workers, find important in their work. Client-tailoring in the Dutch social care policy context on the other hand, is intentionally left open to the interpretation of individual social workers, meaning that social workers' definition of and engagement with client-tailoring may vastly differ from one another. This indicates that the definition and manner of pursuing client-tailoring may also deviate from the existing literature's explanation referring to responsiveness. For this reason, it is interesting to analyse how social workers' role conceptions affect the manner in which they define and pursue client-tailoring.

2.5 Generic Expectations

Considering the theoretical framework and the Dutch context of decentralized social care policy, I expect the definition and manner of pursuing client-tailoring to differ greatly. This is because, social workers may find a combination of values important in their work, which in turn leads to a mix of corresponding role conceptions. As a result, an interesting view on client-tailoring can be discovered.

3. Methodology

This section elaborates on this study's methodological approach. The first part briefly repeats this study's research context, after which the research design is presented. The second part discloses the method of data collection. The third part explains how data analysis has been conducted. The last part of this section provides a reflection on validity and reliability within this study's conducted research.

3.1 Research Context and Research Design

As presented in this study's introductory section, this study focusses on the Dutch case of decentralization within their social care policy. In 2015, the Dutch national government decentralized their social care policy to Dutch municipalities (CPB, 2013; VNG, 2013). With the implementation of decentralization, the Dutch government aims to provide more client-tailored approaches to its citizens when delivering social care services (VNG, 2013; Trommel & Boutellier, 2018). By decentralizing social care services, the Dutch national government has given Dutch municipalities, but more specifically their employed social workers who are in direct contact with citizens, the opportunity to freely interpret and engage in client-tailoring without having to abide by strict rules regarding client-tailoring (CPB, 2013; VNG, 2013). The concept of client-tailoring resides at the heart of the implementation of the decentralization's objectives, which affects many crucial social care policies, including income and employment reintegration processes, long-term care, youth care and social assistance (VNG,2013; Jansen, Javornik, Bummel & Yerkes, 2021). This entails that client-tailoring has become crucial in delivering social care services in these domains (CPB, 2013; VNG, 2013).

As outlined in the theoretical framework, social workers are street-level bureaucrats whose believes in specific values lead them to inhabit corresponding role conceptions, like *the Indifferent, the Caregiver and the Enforcer* (Zacka, 2017). In the Dutch case of decentralization in the social care policy, the definition and manner of pursuing client-tailoring has been intentionally left open to the interpretation of social workers, to enhance the principle of client-tailoring. Given that social workers may inhabit one or more role conceptions, the definition and manner of pursuing client-tailoring may differ for every individual social worker.

To gain a deeper understanding of how social workers' role conceptions define and pursue client-tailoring, this study conducted a qualitative research. This implies that this study's

qualitative research design focussed on gaining answers as to why and how role conceptions impact client-tailoring. Within this qualitative research, a narrative research approach was practised, creating a story-generating process through which detailed stories and perspectives of different individuals came to light (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This indicates that this study presents its findings in a written format.

3.1.1 Case Description and Selection

Decentralization of the Dutch social care policy to Dutch municipalities increased the idea of client-tailoring in the following social care domains: income and employment reintegration processes, long-term care, youth care and social assistance (VNG,2013; Jansen, Javornik, Bummel & Yerkes, 2021). For this reason, this study concentrated on municipalities' social workers working within these social care domains. This study selected social workers working in different municipal departments: income and employment reintegration processes ('Werk & Inkomen'), youth care ('Jeugd & Gezin'), and long-term care and social assistance ('WMO'). Furthermore, when selecting various Dutch municipalities, a mix of most and least populated cities and towns was considered. This requirement was added to discover whether social workers' workload acts as a factor which influences social workers' role conceptions and their perspectives on and experiences with client-tailoring when helping clients.

Social workers working for municipalities often stay in direct professional contact with their clients for a longer period of time (Alcadipani, Cabral, Fernandes & Lotta, 2020; Asad, 2019; Keulemans & Groeneveld, 2020). Due to the longevity of their contact with their clients, this research was provided with diverse individual perspectives and in-depth stories on client-tailoring, which was impacted by social workers' beliefs in the values corresponding to this study's three chosen role conceptions. Also, in this way, this research was able to recognize similarities and differences between social workers' individual perspectives and experiences.

To execute the narrative research approach, this study engaged in field research by conducting twelve in-depth interviews with social workers from various Dutch municipalities and different social care domains. To gather interviewees, different Dutch municipalities were contacted by phone and through e-mail to get in touch with the various departments within the municipalities. Also, several research-invites were sent to Dutch social workers through the social media app LinkedIn. With the use of *snowball sampling*, participating social workers were asked to share the research-invite with their colleagues (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This created a

snowball-effect through which many interviewees were gathered in a short amount of time (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, *snowball sampling* could also have led to a sample which most likely consisted of interviewees who share similar perspectives and experiences, which prevents this study's aim from presenting a variety of perspectives and stories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To prevent this from happening, *criterion sampling* was used by putting forth the following criteria (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Firstly, the interviewees must hail from different Dutch municipalities and departments. Secondly, the interviewee sample must consist of different ages and genders. In this way, this research tried to include social workers' role conceptions and their diverse perspectives on and experiences with client-tailoring. The following table (Table 1) presents the demographic of this study's selected interviewee sample. To safeguard anonymity, the interviewees have been given an alias and their occupation has been categorized within the relevant social care domains. Likewise, instead of mentioning the names of the municipalities, the selected municipalities have been categorized based on their number of inhabitants.

TABLE 1: INTERVIEWEE LIST

Interviewees[1]:	Social care domain:	Inhabitants municipality:
Bill	Income and Employment Reintegration Processes ('Werk & Inkomen')	150,000 – 200,000
Danny	Long-term care and Social assistance ('WMO')	50,000 – 100,000
Ana	Income and Employment Reintegration Processes ('Werk & Inkomen')	150,000 – 200,000
Elsa	Youth care ('Jeugd & Gezin')	200,000+
Grace	Income and Employment Reintegration Processes ('Werk & Inkomen')	150,000 – 200,000
Kate	Income and Employment Reintegration Processes ('Werk & Inkomen')	200,000+
Fred	Income and Employment Reintegration Processes ('Werk & Inkomen')	150,000 – 200,000
Henry	Youth care ('Jeugd & Gezin')	0 – 50,000
Julian	Youth care ('Jeugd & Gezin')	50,000 – 100,000
Nicholas	Income and Employment Reintegration Processes ('Werk & Inkomen')	0 – 50,000
Mindy	Long-term care and Social assistance ('WMO')	50,000 – 100,000
Rose	Income and Employment Reintegration Processes ('Werk & Inkomen')	50,000 – 100,000

[1]The presented names of the interviewees are made up

3.2 Data Collection

The twelve in-depth interviews with the selected interviewees were conducted with the use of the drafted interview guide (see Appendix 1). The following paragraph explains how the key concepts of this study's main research question were operationalized, and how they drafted the interview guide.

3.2.1 Operationalization of Key Concepts

The main research question focusses on how social workers' role conceptions affect how they define and pursue client-tailoring. The first key concept of this research question comprises social workers' role conceptions, which they inhabit based on the corresponding values they adhere to. The second key concept of this research question revolves around social workers' definition and manner of pursuing client-tailoring when handling client-cases. To answer the research question, it is firstly essential to understand what values social workers find important in their work and interactions with their clients.

3.2.1.1 Operationalization of Role Conceptions

As explained in the theoretical framework, this research focusses on the following role conceptions: the Indifferent, the Caregiver and the Enforcer (Zacka, 2017). Each of these role conceptions is paired with corresponding values. The indifferent mostly pays attention to the value of efficiency, the caregiver widely adheres to the value of responsiveness, and the enforcer strongly values the notion of fairness. To find out what values social workers strongly believe in, and thus what roles they inhabit, this research operationalized the three chosen role conceptions according to Zacka's (2017) description of the corresponding values. The operationalization of the three role conceptions is presented in Table 2:

TABLE 2: OPERATIONALIZATION ROLE CONCEPTIONS

Role conceptions:	Corresponding values:	Operationalization:
The Indifferent	Efficiency	Importance of processing client-cases fast and rationalize discretionary judgments economically
The Caregiver	Responsiveness	Importance of attentiveness towards the needs of clients' particularities
The Enforcer	Fairness	Importance of treating all clients based on similar standards and allocating resources deservedly.

The operationalization of the role conceptions was incorporated into the drafted interview guide (see Appendix 1). During the interviews, the interviewees were asked to put forth their perspectives on the importance of these values, with regards to which of these values (one or more) they find most important in their work and client-interactions. To inquire whether interviewees value efficiency, they were asked, 'To what extent do you think it is important to act fast and economical when processing cases?' (See Appendix 1). Questions like, 'To what extent do you think it is important to be attentive to the needs and individual circumstances of your clients?', were asked to inquire whether the interviewees value responsiveness. To analyse whether the interviewees value fairness, they were asked, 'To what extent do you think it is important to treat everyone impartially and allot your resources equitably?'. By asking follow-up questions on why the participants find certain values important and how they would rank the values, role conceptions (one or more) were assigned to every individual participant.

3.2.1.2 Operationalization of Client-Tailoring

Given the research context of this study, decentralization in the Dutch social care policy has given social workers working for municipalities, the opportunity to freely interpret and engage in client-tailoring in any manner they consider best. The impact of social workers' role conception may create differences in the way different social workers define and pursue client-tailoring. Therefore, to answer the research question, this study operationalized client-tailoring by gathered various definitions and experiences of social workers with client-tailoring. This operationalization is presented in Table 3:

TABLE 3: OPERATIONALIZATION CLIENT-TAILORING

Client-Tailoring:	Operationalization:
Defining client-tailoring	"How would <u>you</u> define client-tailoring?"
Pursuing client-tailoring	"Could you provide me with examples of cases in which engaging in client-tailoring went very well?"
	"Could you provide me with examples of cases in which engaging in client-tailoring did not go well?"

The questions presented in Table 3 operationalized the key concept of client-tailoring and were used in the drafted interview guide (Appendix 1). The interviewees were first asked to elaborate on their definition of client-tailoring when interacting with clients. Then they were asked to give

examples of client-cases, which highlighted their definition and engagement with client-tailoring. In this way, this research aimed to analyse how social workers' role conceptions impact their definition and manner of pursuing client-tailoring.

3.2.2 Conducting Interviews

All twelve in-depth interviews lasted between thirty to forty minutes. Before commencing with the interview questions, all participants were asked informed consent and their choice on anonymity to ensure that they were willing to participate in this study's research (see Appendix 1). The interviews were semi-structured, meaning that the key concepts of the research question were all intensively touched upon, yet the smaller interview-questions acted as guidelines to conduct a well-balanced interview (Boeije, 2014). The order of the key concepts, and thus the interview-questions, were also arranged differently when necessary. This research opted for semi-structured interviews to create room for the interviewees to share their perspectives and experiences and include possible examples of relevant cases (Baarda & Van der Hulst, 2017).

Furthermore, due to the fact that this research was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, pandemic-related governmental restrictions impacted this study's research approach. According to the pandemic restrictions, it is strongly advised to work from home as offices, like municipalities remain closed. For this reason, interviews were conducted by phone or through Microsoft Teams. The interviews have been recorded and used for data-analysis. Upon completion of the degree, all gathered data, meaning personal information and recordings, will be deleted.

3.3 Data Analysis

After having conducted the semi-structured in-depth interviews, the recordings were transcribed and then coded using Atlas.ti. The data-analysis of this study focused on creating a data-structure (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013). In the first step of creating a data-structure, a first order analysis was conducted (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013). During this first step, open codes were assigned to the interviews' transcribed data (Boeije, 2014; Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013). The second step of creating a data-structure involved conducting a second order analysis (Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013). In this second step, the open codes of the first step were grouped into axial codes, based on the context of the codes (Boeije, 2014; Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013). The third and final step of creating a data-structure consisted of assigning the axial codes to aggregate dimensions, which refer to overarching themes recognized in the collected data (Boeije, 2014;

Gioia, Corley & Hamilton, 2013). In this way, a data-structure was created. If necessary, the data-structure and the coded interview transcripts can be provided to the first and second reader of this thesis.

It is crucial to mention that the assigned codes to role conceptions and client-tailoring were done differently. Coding the role conceptions was approached in a deductive way because of the existing theory on the three chosen role conceptions, as outlined in the theoretical framework. Coding client-tailoring, however, was approached in an inductive way. This is because this study's research context leaves client-tailoring open to the interpretation of social workers. The research question focusses on gathering different definitions and manners of pursuing client-tailoring. For this reason, client-tailoring was coded according to an inductive approach.

3.4 Reliability and Validity

When using the method of data collection and data analysis, it remained crucial to preserve the reliability and validity of this study's research. To secure the internal validity of this study, the empirical findings of this research are presented through thick descriptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This is applied to show the interviewees perspectives and stories in a broadly detailed manner. In this way, this study ensured that it does not contain researcher bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, the operationalization of the research question's key concepts contributes to safeguarding this study's validity. This is because, the operationalization was incorporated into the interview guide, which created room to ask follow-up questions. In this way, the operationalization ensures that the exact focus of the research question is researched, which preserves the validity of this study (Krefting, 1991). Moreover, the outlined methodology section elaborately explained this study's exact case and selection criteria, as well as the methods of data collection and data analysis. This was done to ensure reliability, seeing as such a dense explanation would increase the chances of repeatability (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Krefting, 1991).

Likewise, this study contributed to the analytical generalizability of the theory explained in the theoretical framework (Yin, 1989). This is due to the fact that this study compared the findings of the interviews (stories, attributes and characteristics) to the existing theory of role conceptions (Krefting, 1991).

4. Results

This section presents the results of this research by answering the sub-questions of this study. The sub-questions were outlined to simplify the multi-layered nature of the main research question. By displaying the answers in the form of the interviewees' quotes, and presenting thick descriptions which encompass their narratives, this study aims to explain the findings of the conducted data-analysis. The first part of this section answers the first sub-question by looking at the interviewed social workers' beliefs in the three values as well as the corresponding role conceptions they inhabit. The second part of this section elaborates on the social workers' individual definitions and manners of pursuing client-tailoring. The third part concludes this section by interpreting and describing the impact of social worker's role conceptions on their definitions and manners of engaging with client-tailoring.

4.1 Social Workers' Role Conceptions and Values

The first sub-question focuses on the main research question's key concept of role conceptions. The first sub-question was outlined as follows: *What role conceptions can be recognized in the manner in which social workers operate, given the corresponding values they believe in?* To answer this sub-question, first an overview of the social workers' belief in the values will be presented. Then, given the social workers' abidance to certain values, the corresponding role conceptions of the social workers will be explained.

4.1.1 The Importance of Values

During the interviews, all social workers were asked about their beliefs in the three values of *efficiency, responsiveness* and *fairness* (Zacka, 2017). They were asked to what extent they deem these values important in their work (see Appendix 1). The interviewees were first asked to put forth their narratives and perspectives on these values. Thereafter, the interviewees were asked to rank the three values from 'most important' to 'least important'. An overview of this ranking is presented in the following table, Table 4:

TABLE 4: SOCIAL WORKERS' RANKINGS ON THE THREE VALUES

Interviewees[1]:	Ranking positions		
	Most important	⟶	Least important
Bill	Responsiveness	Fairness	Efficiency
Danny	Fairness	Efficiency	Responsiveness
Ana	Fairness	Responsiveness	Efficiency
Elsa	Responsiveness	Fairness	Efficiency
Grace	Responsiveness	Fairness	Efficiency
Kate	Responsiveness	Fairness	Efficiency
Fred	Responsiveness	Fairness	Efficiency
Henry	Fairness	Responsiveness	Efficiency
Julian	Fairness	Responsiveness	Efficiency
Nicholas	Fairness	Responsiveness	Efficiency
Mindy	Responsiveness	Efficiency	Fairness
Rose	Fairness	Responsiveness	Efficiency

[1]The presented names of the interviewees are made up

Table 4 presents an overview of the social workers' rankings on the three values. While this overview indicates what values the interviewees find most to least important in their work, many of the interviewees emphasized that all of the three values play a crucial part in their day-to-day work. This implies that while some values may be regarded as highly important, this does not mean that the remaining values are redundant:

> *"The values I adhere to depend on the circumstances [of the client] and the issues within their case. [...] I believe that these values are sort of intertwined with one another. I would start with responsiveness because it allows me to understand the problems a client is facing, and it helps me in assessing what a client needs. If you do that, then you will also achieve efficiency because once you deeply understand the client's circumstances and needs, you won't dwell around looking for the best suitable solution. You will immediately know which approach to go for, which saves a lot [of time and money]. And you know, in that process fairness is already achieved because well, all the*

people that come here, haven't registered themselves for fun. Their circumstances have demotivated them and I can help them. […] This counts for all of my clients, so I do like to treat them equally in that regard." – Mindy, Domain Long-term care and Social assistance

Mindy believes that all of the three values are important in her work. She explains that she ranked responsiveness as 'most important' because that is usually her starting point when she is handed a case. Efficiency and fairness are then achieved in the process of interacting with the client. Mindy points out that one cannot leave out one of the three values if they aim to achieve something with the other remaining values. Because she prefers to work in a reiterative cycle of responsiveness-efficiency-fairness, she ranked these values in the same order.

Just like Mindy, Julian also states that in his daily work, he experiences that the three values coincide with one another:

"If I want to work according to efficiency, well, then I have to activate my ability to act attentive [responsiveness] when I communicate with clients. I mean, in theory, I could only pay mandatory house visits [to clients] and give them instructions and orders on what they must do, without even assessing their situations and needs. […] But if those instructions don't work out, then I have to start over again, which costs a lot of my time and resources. That in itself is not just unfair towards other citizens, it is also inefficient for me and our budgeting to finance [social care] services. You need to consider these values equally." – Julian, Domain Youth Care

Julian describes what kind of influence the three values have on his daily work. He also points out the practical implications of his beliefs in the values, on the cases of clients but also citizens in general. He points out that even though responsiveness is needed to understand his clients' issues, he more strongly believes in fairness. Julian stresses that he prefers to treating everyone equally, and thus also distribute finances fairly. Only when achieving fairness and responsiveness, will he be able to work efficiently. For this reason, Julian ranked fairness above responsiveness, and responsiveness above efficiency.

Unlike Mindy and Julian, Danny ranked his values in the following order: fairness, efficiency, and lastly responsiveness. He believes that his job does involve acting attentively when

communicating with his clients. However, he is appointed as a social worker to do his job, and thus execute his tasks first:

> *"I don't really experience a heavy workload if you only look at the amount of cases I handle in one week. [...] But, I have a lot of other tasks, which have to do with me helping other social workers or doing some municipality-related tasks. This manner of task-division has to do with our financial budget as a municipality, which to be honest is quite meager given that we deliver essential [social care] services. [...] The financial aspect does play a role in my manner of handling cases. Something I always take into consideration, is the fact that our financial budget is gathered from society's tax payments, that is national and social funding. This money should be spent wisely, which means that I should look at who [which client] really deserves my help, who deserves this money. If I focus on that, then I will use this structured list of topics to gain an understanding of the case. Because of this list, I am able to quickly go through my cases, and I get an overview of what I need to provide to the client." – Danny, Domain Long-term care and Social assistance*

Danny explains how his overall workload and financial budgeting scarcity influence how he handles cases. He focuses on fairness first to make sure that the financial budget is spent of those clients who truly deserve the delivered social care services. Because of his overall workload, he tries to go through his cases a little more rapidly by using a list of all relevant topics, that are needed to understand a case. In that way, he can work efficiently and perform all his tasks as well as grasp an understanding of how to act attentive to his clients. For this reason, Danny ranked fairness above efficiency, and efficiency above responsiveness.

4.1.2 Recognizing Role Conceptions

The previous paragraphs showed an overview of the interviewed social workers' beliefs in the three values of *efficiency, responsiveness* and *fairness*. The overview was also provided with some of the interviewees' perspectives on the influence of these values in their work. Based on the overview and perspectives, this paragraph will show what role conceptions the social workers inhabit (the *Indifferent*, the *Caregiver* and the *Enforcer*), based on the corresponding values and perspectives thereof. An overview of the social workers' role conceptions is shown in Table 5:

TABLE 5: SOCIAL WORKERS' ROLE CONCEPTIONS

Interviewees[1]:	Role Conceptions
Bill	Caregiver
Danny	Enforcer/Indifferent
Ana	Caregiver/Enforcer
Elsa	Caregiver/Enforcer
Grace	Caregiver/Enforcer
Kate	Caregiver/Enforcer/Indifferent
Fred	Caregiver/Enforcer
Henry	Caregiver/Enforcer
Julian	Caregiver/Enforcer
Nicholas	Enforcer
Mindy	Caregiver/Enforcer/Indifferent
Rose	Enforcer

[1]The presented names of the interviewees are made up

Table 5 shows what role conceptions the interviewees inhabit. This is not only based on their ranking of the values, but also based on their viewpoint regarding the importance of each of these values in their daily life. During the interviews, the social workers were asked to what extent they find each of the values important in their tasks, given the concepts these values encompass (see Appendix 1).

Bill, works as a social worker in the domain Income and Employment Reintegration Processes. During the interview, Bill stated the following:

> *"Policymakers are responsible for coming up with laws and policies. But we, as social workers, have to implement these laws and policies into the lives of individual citizens. A policymaker won't always know how to do that, because that is mainly our job. So yes, efficiency and fairness are important in our jurisdictions as social workers. But far more important is the attentiveness we give the people. They need us, and we need to understand their issues and lives in order to help them." – Bill, Domain Income and Employment Reintegration Processes*

With his statement, Bill expresses his strong believe in attentiveness, an important attribute of the *Caregiver.* For this reason, Bill mostly inhabits the role of a *Caregiver*.

Unlike Bill, social workers Nicholas and Rose strongly inhabit another role conception. Similar to Bill, Nicholas and Rose also work in the domain of Income and Employment Reintegration Processes.

> *"If I discover that a client has lied in the process, or has committed some sort of fraud while I was helping that person, well, I will be very disappointed. That really is the limit for me. […] [I am helping this person because] I thought that they really deserved my help and our provided services. And when I find out about such lies, even if I still want to help them, I know that I will always suspect them of lying even if they are telling the truth. " – Rose, Domain Income and Employment Reintegration Processes*

Rose points out that the notion of fairness is highly important to her when she interacts with her clients. She strongly believes that trust and open communication should get her clients moving towards a better path. If they lie about their circumstances, she experiences trouble in helping them again. This also applies to Nicholas. Nicholas mentioned that before working as a social worker, he worked as a social investigator ('sociale rechercheur'). His experience there involved a lot of people lying to him about their particular situations. Despite wanting to help people in his current occupation as a social worker, Nicholas admitted that he is always on the look out for possible frauds because of his previous work experience. He only wishes to help those who really need the social care services. For these reasons, both Rose and Nicholas inhabit the role of the *Enforcer*.

The data-analysis of this research points out that it is possible for individual social workers to inhabit two or more role conceptions. This is for instance the case for many interviewed social workers, like: Ana, Elsa, Grace, Fred, Henry and Julian. These social workers inhabit both the role of the *Caregiver* as well as the role of the *Enforcer*.

> *"We must understand [clients'] situations because everyone is different. But we also have to keep it real and look at [other matters] like our budget, [in the*

sense that] we need to treat everyone equally." – Grace, Domain Income and
Employment Reintegration Processes

It is also possible to inhabit all three role conceptions, which is the case for Mindy and Kate. While Mindy works in the domain Long-term care and Social assistance, Kate spends her time as a social worker in the domain Income and Employment Reintegration Processes. Despite differences between these domains, both social workers inhabit the role of the *Caregiver* and the *Enforcer* as well as the *Indifferent.*

> *"We [as social workers] take important decisions and actions within people's*
> *lives. Understanding their problems is thus crucial. At the same time, I need to*
> *fulfil my tasks as a social worker for this municipality, which means that I need*
> *to hold all of my clients to the same standards, so that means no 'special'*
> *treatment for just one of my clients. Because [of the fact that] I do that, I don't*
> *give [clients] excessive attention. That helps in going through all of the cases*
> *that I have to manage very quickly." – Kate, Domain Income and Employment*
> *Reintegration Processes*

The social workers' beliefs in the three values have provided this research with insight as to what role conceptions they inhabit. With these insights, the first sub-question of this study has been answered.

4.2 Social Workers and Client-Tailoring

The second sub-question concentrates on the main research question's key concept of client-tailoring. The second sub-question was outlined as follows: *How do social workers define and pursue client-tailoring?* To answer this sub-question, first the definitions the interviews have given will be shown. Then, the manners of engaging in client-tailoring will be presented.

4.2.1 Defining Client-Tailoring

This research aimed to discover how social workers' definition of client-tailoring is formed after the decentralization within the Dutch social care policy. It was expected that the differences in social workers' role conceptions would affect how they perceive and thus define client-tailoring. Surprisingly, all of the interviewees stated a similar definition of client-tailoring. The only difference in their definition was the manner in which they formulated their definitions.

Elsa, a social worker in the domain of Youth Care, stated that "client-tailoring is about looking beyond youngsters' situation by asking yourself [as a social worker], what do they need?, why are they here?, And what type of assistance do they need the most?". Similarly, Ana stated the following: "Most of the time I can identify myself with my clients due to my personal background. So, I know that in client-tailoring it is important to understand and look at every person's individual problems. For that you will need to talk to them, so they open up to you. And together you will look at the best suitable solution for the problems. That solution must of course fit within your own jurisdiction".

These definitions on client-tailoring entail the basic principle of the concept. All interviewees formulated their definitions differently, yet they delivered the same message. This implies that the differences in social workers' role conceptions may not necessarily assert differences in their definitions on client-tailoring.

4.2.2 Pursuing Client-Tailoring

Even though the interviewed social workers' definitions on client-tailoring is surprisingly similar, their manner of pursuing client-tailoring does consist of differences. Henry is a social worker who is active in the domain Youth care. Like the other interviewees, Henry provides a similar definition on client-tailoring. He pursues client-tailoring as follows:

> *"Let's imagine: a boy does not go to school because he was born with multiple physical and mental disabilities. He becomes one of my clients because he really wants to go to school. So, I communicate with him to understand his way of life and how he sees the world. Then I will look at my professional network within the municipality to contact schools, and arrange for that boy to go to school. Well, speaking from experience, the school will hold the municipality responsible for the financing of services, while the municipality does the same for the school. Normally, I would be able to tell the boy that he won't be able to properly attend school due to such conflicting issues between the school and the municipality. That is because such conflicts always try to base their argument on what the law states. However, because of client-tailoring, I kind of have the advantage of basing my argument of the fact that my client wants to go to school, because that is what he wants, and I support him in that. [...] So then, instead of only informing the boy, I would also act as a mediator*

between the school and the municipality to fulfil that wish of going to school."
– Henry, Domain Youth care

While Henry would try hard to fulfil his client's wish, Fred uses client-tailoring to identify what type of guidance his clients need. Fred is a social worker working in the domain of Income and Employment Reintegration Processes.

> *"I remember, I was guiding a client through the process of reintegrating a client to the field of employment. I like to see myself as the type who coaches his clients by having friendly conversations with them about what it is that they want. In that way, I usually get a grasp of what the client wants and how I can help. But with this particular client, it was a bit different. I noticed that we [the client and I] weren't making any progress, so I transferred her case to one of my colleagues. As it turns out, that colleague gave her clear instructions and deadlines and stuff, which were very clear for her. She made a lot of progress and now she has a wonderful job. She even earns more than me!" – Fred, Domain Income and Employment Reintegration Processes.*

These experiences show that despite sharing a similar definition, social workers each have a different way of pursuing client-tailoring when delivering social care services and interacting with citizens-clients. With these insights, the second sub-question of this study had been answered.

4.3 The Impact of Role Conceptions on Client-Tailoring

So far, this section had presented and discussed the findings of this research' key concepts: role conceptions and client-tailoring. It is now time to interpret how social workers' role conceptions impact their manner of defining and pursuing client-tailoring. Social workers have expressed their views and belief in the three values *efficiency*, *responsiveness* and *fairness*. Many social workers have indicated that they adhere to more than one of these values, as all three play an important part in their street-level work. Based on the values, social workers inhabit corresponding role conceptions, which like values, could also be more than one.

While many social workers expressed that all three values are important in their work, inhabiting role conceptions often signal that some values are more important to social workers than others. Rather than having this reflected in social workers' definition on client-tailoring, this manner of prioritizing these values is mostly reflected in social workers' manner of pursuing client-tailoring. All of the interviewed social workers have given a similar definition of client-tailoring. However, while their definitions were in common with each other, their manner of engaging in client-tailoring differed. One social worker really focused on achieving his client's desires by going to extremes, because he strongly values fairness and responsiveness. He therefore inhabits two role conceptions: the *Enforcer* and the *Caregiver*. His abidance to these values corresponds to his role conception, and they are also reflected in his manner of pursuing client-tailoring.

Another example would be the social worker who used his approach of client-tailoring to identify what type of guidance his client needs. This social worker did this due to his strong believe in the same two values, which makes him a *Caregiver* and an *Enforcer* as well. Like the previous example, this social workers' beliefs in the values correspond to these role conceptions and are reflected in his manner of pursing client-tailoring. This proves that social workers' role conceptions affect the manner in which they pursue client-tailoring. However, social workers' role conceptions do not have a great impact on their definitions of client-tailoring.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

This section concludes this study's research. The first part of this section summarizes the results by discussing the findings from section 4. It then provides a substantiated answer to the main research question of this study and links the results back to the theoretical framework of section 2. The second part of this section concludes this study by disclosing the limitations of the research and presenting avenues for future research.

5.1 Conclusion

This study focused on the case of decentralization in the Dutch social care policy. The Dutch national government implemented this reform in 2015 to provide more client-tailored social care services to its citizens (VNG, 2013; Trommel & Boutellier, 2018). To enhance client-tailoring in social care domains, like income and employment reintegration processes, long-term care, youth care and social assistance, the Dutch national government refrained from formulating rules and regulations regarding defining and pursuing client-tailoring in social care services (CPB, 2013; VNG, 2013). This was decided to create room for Dutch municipalities, but especially their social workers to freely interpret and engage in client-tailoring in a manner they consider best (VNG, 2013). Social workers are street-level bureaucrats who believe in values which may individually differ from each other (Zacka, 2017). Because of these values, social workers individually inhabit various role conceptions, which affects how and why client-tailoring is pursued and defined (Zacka, 2017). The purpose of this study was to understand this dynamic, and therefore outlined the following research question: *How do social workers' role conceptions affect how they define and pursue client-tailoring?*

This study's findings focus on the one hand on social workers' role conceptions, which they inhabit as a result of the corresponding values they believe in. The results on this key concept show that social workers may find more than one value important in their daily work. This results into the fact that the social workers can inhabit two or more role conceptions at the same time. The other part of this study's findings pays attention to social workers' manner of defining and pursuing client-tailoring. These values, and thus role conceptions are mainly reflected in social workers' manner of pursing client-tailoring. These approaches of pursuing client-tailoring can differ among social workers due to the differences in their role conceptions. Nonetheless, social workers' definitions on client-tailoring greatly coincide with each other. This proves that social

workers' role conceptions affect the manner in which they pursue client-tailoring. Yet, social workers' role definitions on client-tailoring are not massively influenced by their values, and thus role conceptions. With this the main research question has been answered.

Looking back at the theoretical framework of this study, the literature on the definition of client-tailoring mostly resembles the findings on social workers' definitions on client-tailoring. Existing literature on client-tailoring define the concept as the way in which street-level bureaucrats tailor towards their clients needs, instead of merely implementing laws and policies (Homburg, Dijkshoorn & Thaens, 2014; King & Cotterill, 2007; Pieterson, Ebbers & Van Dijk, 2007). This definition is in line with the statements of this study's interviewees. Moreover, this research contributed to existing literature on Zacka's (2017) role conceptions. Firstly, by showing that one street-level bureaucrats can inhabit more than one role conception. Secondly, by proving that street-level bureaucrats' role conceptions impact their manner of pursuing client-tailoring.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

When interpreting the results and findings of the research, the limitations of this study must also be considered. Firstly, the reader should bear in mind this qualitative study interviewed twelve social workers from different social care domains. However, the distribution of participants from each social domain was not proportionately divided. This study conducted interviews with twelve social workers from three major Dutch social care domains. This would mean that from each of the three social care domains, 4 social workers were supposed to be interviewed. Nevertheless, the actual ratio of interviewees was as follows: 7 social workers the domain income and employment reintegration processes ('Werk&Inkomen'), 3 social workers from the domain youth care ('Jeugd&Gezin') and only 2 social workers from the domain long-term care and social assistance ('WMO').

The unequal distribution amongst the interviewees influences the level of nuance within the results of this study. This is because, even though all three social care domains have been affected by the implementation of decentralization, the three social care domains still encompass different areas of citizens lives, which is also reflected in public rules and policies. For instance, social workers working within the domain of income and employment reintegration processes ('Werk&Inkomen') mentioned that rules and policies regarding their domain are formulated in a clear and concise manner. They indicated that a value like responsiveness may thus not act as a crucial value within their domain. Compared to that domain, public rules and policies within the

other two domains are formulated in a somewhat broader manner, which creates room for responsiveness. Because of the unequal distribution amongst the interviewees, this research is unable to present the results of this study in a nuanced manner, which would display the beliefs in values, the role conceptions, and definitions and manners of pursuing client-tailoring in a more proportionate way. Future research could replicate this study in a proportionate manner and on a larger scale. This would increase the sample size and could thus be more representative for the population.

Another limitation to be noted are the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the interviews, some social workers addressed how lockdown in the Netherlands led many citizens to lose their jobs and be registered in, for instance income and employment reintegration processes ('Werk&Inkomen'). The interviewed social workers mentioned that this effect of the pandemic heavily increased their workload. This influenced which of three values they deemed more important in their day-to-day work. Many interviewees who experienced a heavy workload, therefore disclosed that at that moment, efficiency was of the utmost importance. Due to the heavy workload, the interviewees were unable to fully engage in client-tailoring within cases that required attentiveness. This indicates that those interviewees do strongly adhere to the value of responsiveness. They were, however, not able to fully express that since the pandemic has so far lasted for about a year. This period of time allowed adhering to efficiency to become 'the new normal'. Seeing as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic influenced this study's research, future research could focus on how different circumstances affect what values social workers adhere to. Not only could such a study take the COVID-19 pandemic into account, but it could also look at how differences in various client-cases impact what values social workers find important.

Furthermore, future research might also explore citizen-clients' viewpoints and narratives on receiving and engaging in client-tailoring. Interviewees of this study mentioned how citizen-clients' distrust in, and fear of cooperation with governmental institutions, like municipalities, affect the clear and effective communication used to pursue client-tailoring. Client-tailoring, nevertheless, relies on the substantial cooperation between social workers and their clients, which requires openness and trust. Client-tailoring thus only turns out fully effective when both parties participate. This study has researched social workers' viewpoints on client-tailoring. Yet, it would be more interesting to conduct research on citizen-clients' perspectives and narratives on engaging and receiving client-tailoring from social workers working in municipalities. This would provide a better understanding of client-tailoring.

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Appendix 1: Interview Guide

*The following questions act as guidelines to ensure a good flow for the interviews. The order of the questions can also be arranged differently if necessary.

Key Concepts	Possible Segues/Remarks	Questions
Introduction	- Explain research focus - Explain data collection and analysis - Interviewee questions? - Record interview - Informed consent (yes/no)? - Anonymous (yes/no)?	Briefly introduce yourself please
		Tell me something about your occupation
		What are your daily tasks?
		What do you think of your workload/caseload?
Role Conceptions		What do you find most important when executing your daily tasks?
	[Caregiver → Responsiveness]	To what extent do you think it is important to be attentive to the needs and individual circumstances of your clients? Why? (+example)
	[Indifferent → Efficiency]	To what extent do you think it is important to act fast and think economically when processing cases? Why? (+example)
	[Enforcer → Fairness]	To what extent do you think it is important to treat everyone impartially and allot your resources equitably? Why? (+example)
	The previous questions revolved around values of efficiency, responsiveness, and fairness.	What do you think of these values? If you had to rank these values from most to least important, what would be your ranking, and why?
Client-Tailoring	*So far, we've discussed what you deem important in your work and what you think of efficiency, responsiveness, and fairness. Based on such values, you engage in client-tailoring when helping clients.*	How would you define client-tailoring?
	[Ask follow-up questions based on interviewees' answers]	Could you provide me with examples of cases in which engaging in client-tailoring went very well?
	[Ask follow-up questions based on interviewees' answers]	Could you provide me with examples of cases in which engaging in client-tailoring did not go well?
Conclude Interview	*We have reached the end of this interview. Thank you for your participation and providing me with relevant insights!*	Do you have any remaining questions or remarks?

**Note: the interviews were held in Dutch