REACHING THE TEACHER? IMPLEMENTATION OF GOVERNMENT INITIATED INNOVATIONS IN THE SCHOOL ORGANIZATION[1]

ULRIKE WESKE[*]

ABSTRACT

Schools are increasingly responsible for the implementation of innovations initiated by government. Combining an institutional and active agency perspective, this study investigates whether these innovations actually reach the teacher by considering implementation at different levels of the school organization. Using a comparative case study approach, this study concludes that it is the combination of institutional pressures from the *environment*, the quality of implementation at all levels of the school *organization* and the role of contextual factors and individual differences at the *organizational* and the *individual level* that influence whether a measure reaches the teacher. Each of these steps is a necessary prerequisite for the ones that follow and a 'missing link' at any level can prevent the measure from reaching the teacher.

INTRODUCTION

School boards and schools in the Netherlands have received more autonomy and responsibility due to a process of deregulation and decentralization starting in the 1980s (Onderwijsraad, 2008; Bronneman, 2011). At the same time however, schools are being confronted with a large number of innovations initiated by government, including large pressures to implement these new practices (e.g., Geijsel, Sleegers, van den Berg & Kelchtermans, 2001). As several authors (see Geijsel et al., 2001) have shown, changes in actions and perceptions of teachers can be extremely difficult to accomplish. Therefore, "considerable research has concentrated on those conditions that foster the successful implementation of innovations" (Geijsel et al., 2001: 131).

Institutional theory has been widely used to study the adoption and diffusion of practices among organizations (Kostova & Roth, 2002; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). A central tenet of the institutional perspective is that organizations sharing the same environment will employ similar practices and thus become 'isomorphic' with each other. In this case, the adoption of practices is explained by the role of institutional pressures driven by legitimacy motives (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

However, several authors (e.g., Oliver, 1991) have shown that room for strategic choice – and therefore varying responses to institutional practices – exists, even in highly

---

[*] Ulrike Weske is a student of the Research Master in Public Administration and Organizational Science at Utrecht University, Erasmus University Rotterdam and Tilburg University, the Netherlands.

institutionalized context such as hospitals (e.g., Boon, Paauwe, Boselie & Den Hartog, 2009). Following Kostova and Roth (2002), we consider an organizations' response as compromised of a behavioral – the actual implementation of the practice – and an attitudinal – employees' belief in the value of the practice – component. Although institutional pressures provide clues on the actual implementation of practices, they do not with regard to employees' attitudes. Literature on the implementation of Human Resource Management (HRM) practices suggests that both strategic choice for development of a measure to contribute to the organizations' strategic goals at the top of the school organization *and* high-quality implementation by the school leader are needed to actually reach the teacher (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013). This leads to the central question of this paper: how do school organizations implement management-innovations initiated by government and under which conditions does implementation reach the teacher?

To consider the implementation of innovations in the organization, theoretical models in the implementation of HRM practices are used. These models (e.g., Wright and Nishii, 2013) make a distinction between intended practices at the top of the organization, actual practices as executed by the line manager and perceived practices by the employee. Combining literature on institutional pressures and implementation in the organization allows us not only to consider strategic choice at the top of the organization (see Boon et al., 2009) or whether employees are convinced about a measure's value (Kostova & Roth, 2002), but also if and how implementation in the organization influences whether government initiated innovations actually reach the teacher.

This article will proceed with an elaboration on the theoretical concepts and the conceptual model that have guided the empirical data collection. After describing the research setting and the methods, the results of the study will be presented. This is followed by the discussion of the results and some concluding remarks.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Innovations

Innovation is studied in many disciplines and has been defined from different perspectives (Damanpour & Schneider, 2006). Although 'innovation' is defined in several ways, all definitions emphasize "the perceived newness of the ideas for the individual" (Rogers, 2003: 34). As Damanpour and Schneider (2006) argue, 'newness' is a relative term; an innovation can be new to an individual adopter, a group or team, an organization and industry. A distinction is often made between technical – product, process and service innovations – and administrative – procedures, policies and organizational forms – innovations (e.g., Damanpour, 1991).

The innovation-process has been divided into several phases (see Rogers, 2003; Damanpour & Schneider, 2006, 2008), most importantly adoption and implementation. *Adoption*

decision reflects "evaluating the proposed ideas from technical, financial and strategic perspectives, making the decision to accept an idea as the desired solution, and allocating resources for its acquisition, alteration and assimilation" (Damanpour & Schneider, 2008: 217). *Implementation* "consists of events and actions that pertain to modifying the innovation, preparing the organization for its use, trial use, and acceptance of the innovation by the users and continued use of the innovation until it becomes a routine feature of the organization. In this phase, the innovation is put into use by organizational members, clients or customers" (idem). As Guest and Bos-Nehles (2013) argue, in the public sector there is often no choice in the adoption of measures introduced by government (cf. Boyne et al., 2005). However, there is a choice in the implementation of these measures.

Drawing on Tolbert and Zucker (1996), Kostova and Roth (2002) make a distinction between implementation and internalization. *Implementation* "is expressed in the external and objective behaviors and the actions required, or implied, by the practice" (p. 217). *Internalization* "is that state in which the employees at the recipient unit view the practice as valuable for the unit and become committed to the practice" (idem). Kostova and Roth argue that "implementation and internalization reflect the overall level or 'depth' of adoption of the practice" (idem). The authors pay special attention to the situation of 'ceremonial adoption', "formal adoption of a practice on the part of a recipient unit's employees for legitimacy reasons, without their believing in its real value for the organization" (Kostova & Roth, 2002: 220). Ceremonial adoption is likely to result from high uncertainty about the value of the practice combined with a strong pressure to adopt the practice (cf. Klein & Sorra, 1996). In the case of primary education, large pressure from government for the implementation of innovations are expected and therefore ceremonial adoption seems likely.

Institutional pressures and strategic choice

The innovation literature discussed above seems to be based on the implicit assumption of economic rationality. According to this perspective, adoption decisions are rational decisions based on the costs of benefits of an innovation (Paauwe & Boselie, 2005; Van den Broek, Boselie & Paauwe, 2013). Normative rationality, in contrast, can account for shaping practices irrespective of a possible effect on performance (Paauwe & Boselie, 2005). In this case, the adoption of practices is explained by organizations' conformity to *institutional pressures* driven by legitimacy motives (Kostova & Roth, 2002).

Within institutional theory[2], a central tenet is that organizations sharing the same environment will employ similar practices. This process is referred to as isomorphism, which is "a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of institutional conditions" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983: 149). Two main types of isomorphism are competitive and institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The first assumes a system of rationality and emphasizes market competition (Boon et al., 2009). The

second focuses on institutional pressures on organizations and seems therefore more promising to explain the implementation of government measures. Three types of isomorphic pressure, presenting different motives for adopting social patterns (Kostova & Roth, 2002, are often distinguished: coercive, mimetic and normative (e.g., DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Coercive isomorphism "results from both formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectation in the society within which organizations function" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983: 150) and may for example be the be felt by government pressure for implementation. Mimetic isomorphism is the result of uncertainty, which is a powerful force that encourages organizations to model themselves on other organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In the case of the implementation of government initiated innovations, schools could model themselves on schools that have a successful approach to implementation. Normative isomorphism stems primarily from professionalization (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), which is interpreted as "the collective struggle of members of an occupation to define the conditions and methods of work, to control 'the production of producers', and to establish a cognitive base and legitimation for their occupational autonomy" (p. 152).

Institutional theory has often been criticized as largely being used to explain the persistence and homogeneity of phenomena, thereby paying relatively little attention to the role of interest and agency in shaping actions (Dacin, Goodstein & Scott, 2002; Garud, Hardy & Maguire, 2007; Oliver, 1991). Oliver (1991: 146) posits that institutional theory can accommodate active agency when organization's responses to institutional pressures and expectations "are not assumed to be invariably passive and conforming across all institutional conditions". Rather, institutional pressures are not deterministic, but mediated by the active role of decision makers – or *active agency* – within the organization (cf. Paauwe, 2004; Child, 1972). The role of active agency is supported by empirical research, for example by Boon et al. (2009), who found that there is room for strategic choice in highly institutionalized contexts, such as hospitals.

Implementation at different levels of the school organization
Several authors (e.g., Becker and Huselid, 2006; Wright & Nishii, 2013; Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013) have located effective strategy *implementation* as the key mediating variable between policies and their outcomes. Therefore, theoretical models on the implementation of HRM practices make a distinction between intended, actual and perceived practices at different levels of the organization.

Intended implementation

Wright and Nishii (2013) argue that *intended practices* or *policies* are the outcome of the development of an HR strategy that is believed to effectively elicit the employee responses desired. However, as Guest and Bos-Nehles (2013) argue, based on Paauwe (2004), legislation may require organizations to implement practices – regardless of whether the organization beliefs in its value for the organization. As a result, organizations will invariably report that the practices are in place by meeting the minimum requirements to *comply* with legislation with no concern to implement the measure in such a way that it has a positive impact on the organization. Alternatively, practices may be *developed* to assist the organization in reaching its strategic goals, such as – in case of primary education – professionalization (cf. literature on institutional entrepreneurship – e.g., Garud et al., 2007). This is similar to Boon et al. (2009: 495), who argue that there are different strategic reactions to institutional pressure: "deviant behavior as active resistance, conformist behavior as a passive or neutral response and innovative behavior as active development". *Top managers* can play an important role in the implementation of HR measures, for example by aligning HRM strategy with the business strategy, effectively – clearly, unambiguously and consistently – communicating the policies and values of the policy throughout the organization and lead by example with their own implementation of policies (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013: 90).

Actual implementation by the school leader

While some HR policies impact on employees directly, most rely on line managers' support or action (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Based on the difference between espoused strategy (what leaders say the strategy is) and realized strategy (what they are actually doing) formulated by Mintzberg (1978), Wright and Nishii (2013) propose that *actual practices* refer to the practices that are enacted, often by line managers. The difference between intended and actual practices is based on the assumption that senior managers may endorse HR policies, but it is line managers who are responsible for implementation on the ground (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Purcell & Kinnie, 2007; Knies, 2012; Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013). It may be that not all HR practices are actually implemented, and those that are, may be implemented differently from the original intention.

Line managers may differ in their motivation and ability to implement HR practices (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013; Bos-Nehles, 2010; Knies, 2012; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Knies and Leisink, forthcoming), for example because of time pressures and competing priorities, lack of commitment or belief in the practice or lack of capability for effective implementation. In addition, line managers may be left to their own device or can be closely monitored in their implementation. This is in line with Knies (2012) and Knies and Leisink (forthcoming), who consider how managers' opportunity influences their implementation.

Perceived implementation by the teacher

As Wright and Nishii (2013) argue, the actually implemented measures can be *perceived* and interpreted differently by each employee in the focal group. The linkage between the actual and the perceived HR practices represents the 'communication challenge'. Purcell and Hutchinson (2007: 7) argue that "Taken together people management has a non-instrumental role of communicating to employees the nature of the firm, their value to it and the type of behaviors expected" (cf. Wright & Nishii, 2013; Bowen and Ostroff, 2004). According to Purcell and Hutchinson (2007), perceptions of employees are not only determined by employees' perception of the *implementation of HR practices* by managers, but also by their *leadership behavior* – which is connected to the role of interpersonal relationships. Together, these two aspects are referred to as people management.

In addition, Wright and Nishii (2013) propose that both individual differences and social context can play a role in how employees perceive a measure. First, *individual's schemas* influence the information that they attend to, and how that information is processed. Research has demonstrated how individuals' past histories with similar phenomena can strongly influence their perceptions of a focus phenomenon. Second, with regard to the *social context* of practices, a period of 'sensemaking' – during which employees seek to understand the goals of the new practices – is likely when new practices are introduced (cf. Knies, 2012).

The role of context

Purcell and Kinnie (2007) argue that, although Wright and Nishii's model provides an excellent basis, it needs further refinement with regard to the organizational context (cf. Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013). Similarly, several authors have argued that incorporation of contextual variables into research is needed to prevent drawing conclusions that are explained way by context variables (e.g., Boselie, Dietz & Boon, 2005; Paauwe, 2004). Purcell and Kinnie (2007) present two more 'concrete' aspects of the organizational context: the operational system – including staffing levels, job design, and the 'social relations of production' – and values and culture – embedded assumptions and shared values. These aspects are similar to what Paauwe (2004) calls an organization's configuration or administrative heritage; the organization's workforce, structure, systems, practices and culture.

The conceptual model presented in figure 1 will be used to investigate the implementation of government initiated innovations at different levels of the school organization. Specific attention is paid to the different levels at which the theoretical concepts are situated: the institutional pressures – which are taken as an 'antecedent' – are situated in the organization's *environment*, implementation occurs at the *organizational* level and perceived implementation at the *individual* level. For simplicity, this 'model' does not show all possible interconnections and several lines might be added (cf. literature on coevolution – Volberda & Lewin, 2003). First,

organizations and their participants also exert important effects on governance structures (Dacin et al., 2002). Second, perceived implementation may be influenced both by top management directly, by the line manager (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007) and by factors from employees' context, like unions. Third, teachers may also affect their school leader and school board through to the works councils at school and board level.

FIGURE 1 *Conceptual model*
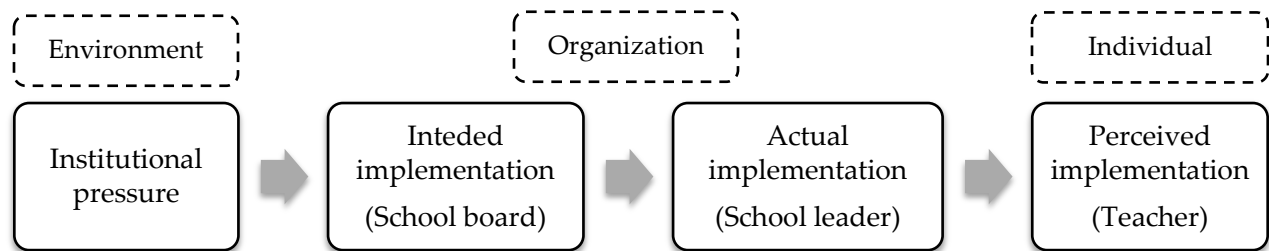
RESEARCH DESIGN

Research setting

Dutch primary education provides education for children from 4 to 12 years. The sector comprises 6.848 schools and is financed by the Ministry of Education. Schools can have a different 'denomination' or background. Broadly speaking, a distinction can be made between 'non-religious' (about a third of all schools) and 'religious' (about two thirds of all schools) schools. In addition, schools can have specific educational foundation, like 'Dalton' or 'Jenaplan', influencing the method of teaching. Schools are managed by a school leader, and – in larger schools – an assistant school leader and/or '*bouwcoördinatoren*' [group coordinators]. Since these adjunct school leaders coordinators are teachers themselves, their management tasks are usually limited and consist mostly of coordinating a number of teachers within the school. Most schools have an *'intern begeleider'* [special needs teacher], which is responsible for children with special needs. Although some schools are still responsible for all aspects of their management themselves, most schools are under so called school boards. The degree of autonomy granted to schools varies per board (Bronneman, 2011).

The measure that is used as a 'vehicle' to investigate the implementation of government initiated innovations is the 'job mix'. This is a management-practice that aims to differentiate teachers into different functions and pay scales and as a result make the teaching profession more appealing. This measure is considered to be an administrative innovation since it is a new practice for the education sector, focused on the management of teachers. The Ministry of Education, employer-organizations and unions have made an agreement about the implementation of the measure. This agreement is part of the collective labor agreement and it

set targets with regard to the division of teachers over different salary scales; in 2014, 40 percent of the teachers should be appointed in the higher *'Teacher B' (*TB) scale, (the standard scale for a teacher in primary education is the lower '*Teacher A*' (TA) scale). The measure is partly financed by the Ministry of Education and implementation started in August 2010 (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Data collection and analysis

Since the objective of this study was exploration and theory-building, a case study approach was employed (Eisenhardt, 1989). Using this approach allowed for a more careful consideration of perceptions and motivations of important actors and context (Blatter & Haverland). Central to the case studies was the implementation of the job mix, which was used as a clearly delimited and clear vehicle to study the implementation of government measures in primary education.

Three *diverse cases* were selected based on theoretical sampling (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Variance in the implementation of the job mix was achieved in two ways. First, 'leaders' and 'laggards' in implementation of the job mix were suggested by the Primary Education Council (PO-Raad). Second, we used the website of the Ministry of Education on the implementation of the job mix to select cases with differing degrees of implementation (see table 1). Furthermore, attention was paid to the representativeness of the sample. Based on discussions with the Primary Education Council (PO-Raad), we selected boards with different 'denominations' and geographical locations. Large cities were excluded due to their differing labor market for teachers.

To account for differences and similarities in actual and perceived implementation, two schools were selected within each board. Respondents at the board level were asked to recommend two schools that differed largely in their implementation. In addition, schools of different sizes and educational foundations were selected for representativeness.

TABLE 1 *Percentages of TB-scales*

	2010	2011	2012
Sector average	6.8	14.0	17.8
Board A	8.7	11.2	16.0
School 1	0.0	0.0	3.1
Board B	1.3	9.1	11.0
School 3	0.0	1.1	18.6
School 4	5.4	21.9	19.8
Board C	14.7	17.4	18.9
School 6	10.5	15.1	17.4

(Source: Ministry of Education, n.d.; data were not available for all schools)

We used documents and interviews to collect data. First, background information – consisting of school boards' strategic policy documents and schools' school plans – was collected for each organization and studied to prepare for the interviews. We used purposive sampling (Patton, 2002) to select nineteen respondents from different levels of the school organization: board members and HR-directors at the board level, and school directors and teachers at the school level (see table 2). In addition to being able to investigate implementation at different levels of the school organization, involving at least two parties in the data collection helps to arrive at a more reliable assessment.

TABLE 2 *Overview of respondents*

	Board A	Board B	Board C	Total
Board member	1	-	2	3
HR-director	1	1	-	2
School leader	2	2	2	6
Teacher	4	3	1	8
Total	8	6	5	**19**

The interviews were semi-structured and focused on the conceptual model presented above. The focus was on the broad research theme of *implementation* and questions were adapted to three levels in the school organization. On the board level, the questions focused on what the measure entailed to the respondents, how they experienced it and what the board had done with regard to implementation. In addition, we asked respondents about the influence of environmental – representing institutional pressures – and organizational factors on implementation. On the school leader level, the focus was on how the school leaders experienced the job mix and its intended implementation by the board and how they implemented the measure themselves. School leaders were also asked about environmental and organizational factors influencing implementation. Finally, at the teacher level, the focus was on how they perceived implementation from both the school leader and the board, and what their perceptions about the measure were (to see whether they had internalized the measure). Teaches were also asked about the influence of environmental and organizational factors. Interviews lasted between 1 and 1½ hours and all interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To cope with the large amount of data and to get familiar with the cases, within-case analysis was conducted by detailed case study write-ups. This was followed by a cross-case search for patterns in order to go beyond initial impressions and to improve the likelihood of accurate and reliable theory (Eisenhardt, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Braun & Clarke, 2006). A 'theoretical' thematic analysis (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to identify, analyze and report patterns in the data based on the conceptual model. Finally, the overall impressions and themes that emerged from the within-site and cross-site analyses were systematically compared

to the evidence from each case in order to assess how well the emergent frame fitted the data (Eisenhardt, 1989).

RESULTS

Case descriptions

Board A is a catholic school board comprising 17 schools, located in a fast growing city in the province of Utrecht. The board was founded in 2005 as a result of a merger of six school boards. This organization employs 348 fulltime employees educating 6108 children. The strategic policy of the board focuses on 'learning from each other', for both children and employees. The board has several focus areas, like employee professionalization, and schools should work on these areas. With regard to personnel management, an 'integral personnel policy' was developed, focusing on schooling and mobility. There is a strong focus on the professionalization of the teacher, which includes for example competence profiles and -scans. The job mix is an explicit part of the policy formulated at the board level and is connected to both teacher and organizational development.

School 1 is located in a residential area with mostly white, highly-educated parents. The school was founded 90 years ago and employs 24 fulltime employees teaching 448 children. Under the previous school leader, educational and organizational development – including the management of personnel – was limited. The culture was described as 'conservative': teachers were around for a long time and used to 'their way' of doing things. This lack of development was covered by the high results of the school. In 2010, the board appointed a new school leader to change the education and culture within the school.

School 2 started as a sub location of another school in 1995 and is independent since 2001. The school employs about 60 employees and 770 children and is growing fast due to its location in a new housing area – with mainly highly-educated, white parents. The school consists of two buildings, resulting in two 'subcultures'; the main building, which had all resources and privileges, and the 'other' building. Because the school was mainly growing and not much was done with regard to educational and organizational development, a new school leader was brought in in 2012 to create a vision, a more dynamic culture and an 'outside face' for the school's environment.

Board B is a public school board comprising 19 schools, located in a slightly shrinking city in the province of Friesland. It was founded in 2005 and employs 138 fulltime employees educating 2533 children. The strategic policy of the board focuses on the move from school organization to 'educational network'. The board has a clear division of responsibilities between the board and schools, resulting in a large degree of autonomy for schools. The personnel 'policy' of this board seems not to be developed actively and is 'aimed' at finding, interesting

and keeping employees – without presenting a concrete plan on how to achieve this goal. The job mix is not mentioned as part of the personnel policy, except as one of the performance indicators in the appendix.

School 3 was founded in 1975 and was appointed as a Jenaplan-school – focusing on children's personal development – by the municipality in 1988. The school employs 5 fulltime employees and 51 children and is located in an area with lower-educated parents. Currently, the school is shrinking due to the ageing population and the large amount of schools in the area and as a result, the school will merge with another school in 2014. In 2007, the school was appointed as 'weak' by the educational inspection. The school leader is working in the school since 2007, and has been focusing on improving the level of the school.

School 4 is situated in a fast-growing new housing area with mostly white, high-educated parents. It was founded in 2001 and employs 15 fulltime employees and 340 children. The culture of this school has been described as 'eager' and 'professional'. Because the school has grown less than planned – also due to the neighboring school that has grown more than expected – a new school leader was brought in that focuses more on relations with the school's environment – including parents of potential students.

Board C is a 'mixed' board comprising 13 schools, located in a slightly growing city in the province of Utrecht. It was founded in 2009 after a merger of the three boards (catholic, public and protestant) and employs 134 fulltime employees teaching 2310 children. Recently, a new structure was created at the board level: four 'cluster school leaders', each centrally steering two or three schools, form an 'extra level' between the schools and the board. Currently, a new strategic policy is being written by these cluster school leaders and two of them are focusing on developing a HRM-policy, which – until now– only exists of the goals to have 'professional and motivated' employees and to 'reach the TB quotum', without any further specifications of how to reach these goals. In contrast to the other boards, this board has no HRM-employees and the cluster school leaders are supported by an administration office, indicating a focus on administrative issues rather than policy-development.

School 5 was founded in 1972 and employs 7 employees teaching 86 children. Over the years, it has been developing a strong educational concept, focusing on children's different qualities and a coaching role for teachers. This teaching concept is supported by the building, which is open instead of being divided into classrooms. The culture has been described as family-like, which can be seen in the daily 'tea moment'. The school has received the mark 'excellent' from the educational inspection and specializes on children with dyslexia. Due to the new board structure, the previous school leader became a cluster school leader and the school has a new location school leader, who is partly teaching.

School 6 was founded over hundred years ago and has changed its location several times. It employs 22 full time employees and 409 children and is located in a fast-growing new housing area. In 2011, the school became a 'Dalton school' – focusing on responsibility,

independency and collaboration of children – school in order to provide better education for all children. The culture is described as 'brotherly'. This school also has a new school leader due to the new structure of the board.

Institutional pressures and degree of leeway

School boards indicated that coercive pressures played an important role in the implementation of the job mix. These coercive pressures seem to be aimed at reaching the percentages, rather than at the quality of implementation. Concrete incentives and punishments are coupled to the measure:

> "You can pay the TB-scales from the money you receive from the Ministry, but if you don't live up to the percentages, the Ministry gives you no money. Plus if you do not appoint TB-teachers in your own organization, you even have to hire teachers from outside your board" (Board C, Cluster school leader).

Furthermore, since implementation of the job mix is part of the collective labor agreement, boards argued that the unions are exercising pressure – and even go to court when school boards do not reach the percentages – to put as many teachers as possible into a TB-scale. This is because unions see the job mix as a way to increase teachers' salaries.

Two of the boards are in networks – representing mimetic pressures – to share experiences and information and learn from each other's implementation of the job mix. However, since all schools have to introduce the measure at the same time, it is more difficult to learn from 'best practices' in other organizations. Finally, normative pressures did not seem to play any role with regard to the job mix.

Intended implementation

As can be expected from the large coercive pressures for implementation, the job mix was implemented in all cases. Differences were found however with regard to the quality of implementation. Two of the boards were found to be mainly *complying* – without actively developing policy. In board B, the focus was on specifying the demands coupled to the measure, most importantly with regard to the educational level. No policy was however developed and the board only communicated the required percentage per school to the school leaders. In addition, teachers were directly approached about the possibility to apply for a higher function. In board C, no policy was developed and the focus was on reaching the percentages. Teachers were not offered the opportunity to apply for the higher function, but were appointed by the school leaders.

"The job mix is implemented by the schools. We only control whether the schools reach the required percentages. We did not plan on board level…Well all special needs teachers are appointed" (Board C, Cluster school leader).

In board A on the other hand, the board actively *developed* the measure to their strategic goal of professionalization and even included the measure in their personnel strategy as a way to get more knowledge into the school. Examples of this active development are the scan that teachers can fill out to test whether they would be applicable for a higher scale and the development of a procedure, which includes class visits, appraisal talks and a presentation in the presence of a school leader from another school. In addition, a selection-committee was used to decide whether the teacher would get the higher scale. Moreover, this board organized information evenings and meetings where teachers from different scales could meet each other and approached teachers directly with information about the measure by sending around newsletters with updates on the implementation and interviews with TB-teachers.

Ability and motivation at the board level
Although this was not considered in the literature review, it seems that ability and motivation of actors at the board level played an important role in the quality of the policy. With regard to *ability*, in board C the cluster school leaders have no experience in board issues and HRM, which could make policy development more difficult. With regard to *motivation*, we found that the cluster school leaders in board C and the HR-director in board B seemed not to be motivated by the measure:

"The job mix is so tightly regulated that the only choice you have is to execute" (Board B, HR-director).

In board A on the other hand, the board members seemed more motivated about the measure. They indicated that the job mix supported their aim of professionalization of the teacher.

"It is a stimulus to get more knowledge into the school and to differentiate between teachers – because not every teacher performs the same tasks and it suits our modern society" (Board A, Board member).

Actual implementation
Following the quality of implementation at the board level, differences in implementation were found at the school level. In boards B and C – where a *compliant approach* to implementation was chosen – school leaders did also comply:

"Here we had an old special needs teacher and a new one and, based on the percentages, the board proposed to first give all special needs teacher a TB-function. After that, we had already reached our percentage" (School 5, Location school leader).

In board A, where policy was *developed* at the board level, both school leaders followed the procedure that was set out by the board, which resulted in a high quality of implementation at the school level.

School leaders' ability, motivation and opportunities for implementation
In addition the important role of the quality of implementation at the board level, school leaders' 'opportunity' seemed to be of particular importance. High pressure for implementation was found in boards A and C, whereas school leaders in board B felt no pressure. In board C, this pressure was aimed at appointing enough teachers (to *comply* with the coercive pressures). When the percentage is too low, the cluster school leaders are suggesting which teachers could be appointed into a higher scale. In board A, pressure for appointing teachers *and* following the procedure as set out by the board were found:

"And there was pressure from the board of course: they said sorry, you have 0% that is not an option" (School 1, School leader).

"You had to confirm to the procedure laid out by the board, there was no escape" (School 1, School leader).

The quality of implementation and the pressure exerted by the board seemed to influence school leaders' *motivation* for implementation. In board C – which had a compliant approach to implementation and high pressure for implementation – school leaders were clearly not motivated:

"Education is about the primary process, and not because we as teachers want to earn 30 euros more. Not at all" (School 4, School leader).

In board B, where a compliant approach and no pressure for implementation were found, motivation of school leaders differed. The school leader of school 3 would rather use the money for a personal appraisal system, because according to her, the career ambition is zero in primary education. Although the school leader of school 4 seems more motivated, seeing the measure as an opportunity to offer career chances to teachers, he is disappointed because he cannot implement the job mix in the way he would like.

"That makes me angry: the goal of the job mix is to stimulate people and offer them career chances. But now you're using the measure in a wrong way" (School 4, School leader).

In board A – where policy was developed – school leaders were convinced about the measures' value and were motivated to implement it. The job mix was seen as a helpful measure to enlarge the career pattern of teachers and as a possibility to show that they are a good teacher. However, due to the large pressure for implementation by the board, school leaders were mainly 'executing' and their motivated seemed to play a limited role.

Differences in school leaders' *ability* seemed to play a role in board C, because none of the school leaders had management education. Due to the compliant approach by the board however, the ability of school leaders seems to be less important however.

Context

Which contextual factors played a role in implementation seemed to be related to the approach to implementation. In boards B and C, where a compliant approach was found, school leaders indicated that differences in implementation were due to one or several of the following factors. First, *organizational size* determined the number of coordinating functions an organization had – and therefore how many teachers could be appointed into a higher scale – and whether there is enough money to provide teachers with time to attend to these coordinating tasks. In larger schools, this resulted in more possible teachers for a higher function.

Second, *teacher age* (or life phase) is related to their willingness for development and taking up additional tasks within the school. In general, it is argued that older teachers were less willing to develop themselves and take up additional tasks. This willingness seems to be related to teachers' initiative to apply for a higher function. The school leader of school 4 for example argued that there were many teachers applying for the TB-function, due to the low average age of his team. In the other school within board B, in contrast, the average age of teachers was quite high.

Third, *teacher quality* (or level of education) determines whether teachers are able to absolve additional education and to take up additional tasks. In some schools, school leaders argued that there were no teaches that would be applicable for a higher function due to missing quality. For these teachers, it was difficult enough to live up to the standards of the TA-function.

In board A in contrast, where policy was developed, both school leaders emphasized the importance of *culture* within the school. There should be a safe environment to stand out from the crowd and learning and development should be normal. In addition, the case of school 1 showed the importance of *organizational development.* When other – more urgent – changes need to be implemented in the organization, implementation of the job mix can be delayed or hampered.

Perceived implementation

In boards B and C, where a *compliant* approach to implementation was found, none of the teachers internalized the measure. In these cases, nothing really changed for the teacher, since they were still executing the same tasks in the TB-scale as they were when still in the TA-scale.

> "In first instance every school had to appoint at least one teacher. In every school the special needs teacher was appointed because they had already finished additional education" (School 5, Teacher).

> "To me, [the job mix] has nothing to do with the children, nothing to do with quality" (School 4, Teacher).

A theme that was not considered in the literature but that emerged from the interviews was *organizational justice*. This theme only seemed to play a role in board B – where the approach to implementation was unclear and there was more room for school leaders in the implementation:

> "In the end, the school leader had to make the decision, and the selection committee was not used and it was all very vague. That was a pity. In my opinion, you should show why some people get the higher function, and others don't. And that is dangerous. Now you could have bad luck when you have a bad relation with your school leader" (School 4, Teacher).

In board A on the other hand, where a policy was *developed* and communicated clearly and consistently to teachers, teachers' work changed after getting a higher function since they got an additional coordinating task in their area of specialty. Here, teachers seemed to have internalized the measure.

> "I applied in the first place because I noticed that teachers were lacking tools to adequately respond to children with behavioral difficulties. So I wanted to have more tools, for myself but also to pass them to others" (School 2, Teacher).

Individuals' schemas and social context

Differences in individuals' schemas and social context seemed only to play a role in the schools under board A. With regard to *individual differences*, one teacher in school 1 had experienced the measure in her previous school – where quality of implementation was high – and another teacher had experienced similar measures in her previous job in healthcare. The *social context* seemed to be different in school 1 and school 2; mainly because implementation had started earlier in school 2 and therefore, the job mix was considered to be 'more normal'.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this paper was to explain if and how implementation in the organization affects whether government initiated innovations actually reach the teacher. We used the concepts of institutional pressures, strategic choice and implementation in the organization to investigate several factors that could explain whether the teacher is reached.

The results indicate that, although high coercive pressures do lead to implementation in all cases, they cannot explain why some school board only comply whereas others develop the measure to contribute to their strategic goals. These differences found in the approach to implementation at the board level indicate that, even in cases of limited leeway, different strategic choices are made, which is in line with findings in other sectors such as health care (e.g., Boon et al., 2009). These results show the importance of leadership at the top of the organization (cf. Damanpour & Schneider, 2006; 2008; Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013). In addition to the expected importance of line managers' ability and motivation (e.g., Knies & Leisink, forthcoming), the results indicate that top managers' ability and motivation also play an important role in determining the quality of implementation.

At the school level, we found that the implementation of the school leader was highly dependent on the quality of implementation by the board. This is in line with Guest and Bos-Nehles (2013: 82), who argue that "without a system of at least reasonable quality, there can be no effective implementation by line management". The missing development of policy in boards B and C led to difficulties for school leaders in determining which teachers were applicable for a higher function and which were not – leading to a situation where the justice of implementation was doubted by employees. As Knies (2013) argues, the perception of justice is related to the HR policy the manager is executing. When this policy leaves more room, the implementation of the line manager will be even more important. A low perceived organizational justice could have negative consequences for the employees' reactions to implementation, and therefore on the effectiveness of the measure.

In addition, the results have highlighted the role of 'internal control' exercised by the board. In two cases, the board was exerting a large degree of control on implementation by the school leader. This control focused on both implementation (to comply with the demands of percentages) and on sticking to the procedure as set out by the board. This had implications for the role of school leaders in the implementation; when strong internal control was in place, school leaders' ability and motivation seemed to matter less, because their only option was to execute. These findings are in line with findings on managers in the public sector; an environment that is known for its constraints on managerial autonomy (e.g., Knies & Leisink, forthcoming). Based on Antonsen and Jorgensen (1997), Knies and Leisink argue that organizations with high publicness – such as primary schools – are confronted with determined effort by ministries to control them. In response to this external control, senior managers tend to impose internal hierarchical control.

Communication played an important role in the perceived implementation by teachers. In the boards that chose a compliant approach to implementation on the one hand, the communication to teachers was either showing the boards' 'ambition' to reach the percentages (in board C) or its difficulties in establishing clear criteria for promotion (in board B). In both cases, this led to teachers not being convinced about the measure's value. In board A, on the other hand, the school board communicated clearly, unambiguously and consistently about the job mix and this communication was enforced by the school leaders. This seemed to have led to teachers being convinced about the measures' value and therefore, we argue that in this board, the job mix has 'reached' the teacher.

Finally, the case study approach allowed us to explicitly consider contextual variables (see Purcell & Kinnie, 2007). We found that the contextual variables that played a role according to the interviewees were connected to the quality of implementation. It seems therefore that effective implementation is not only "likely to depend to a considerable extent on features of the wider organizational context" (Guest & Bos-Nehles, 2013: 81), but it also influences whether and which contextual variables are relevant. This indicates that there are no 'stable' contextual factors which are at play for most organizations, but that the combination of context and (quality of) implementation should be considered.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that although institutional pressures can explain implementation of government measures, it cannot explain whether a measure reaches the teacher. This is because the quality of implementation at different levels of the organization is crucial for convincing employees about the value of a practice. Therefore, the research question – how do school organizations implement management-innovations initiated by government and under which conditions does implementation reach the teacher? – can be answered as follows. It is the combination of institutional pressures from the *environment*, the quality of implementation at all levels of the school *organization* and the role of contextual factors and individual differences at the *organizational* and the *individual level* that influence whether a measure reaches the teacher. Each of these steps is a necessary prerequisite for the ones that follow and one 'missing link' at any level can prevent the measure from reaching the teacher.

With regard to further research, the important role of top managers in formulating high quality policy and the role of their ability and motivation, suggests that it may be worthwhile to pay more attention to the top manager. This could for example be done by extending Knies and Leisink's (forthcoming) approach – focusing on line manager's ability, motivation and opportunity to implement measures – to the top management level. In addition, due to the large role of top management in limiting the 'leeway' for implementation of line managers, it seems promising to further investigate how actors at the top of the organization influence line

managers' implementation. Finally, the findings with regard to context suggest that more attention should be paid to its role in the implementation of practices. This should go further than considering the 'usual suspects' like organizational size and could include further investigation of the relationship with the approach to implementation and the different levels of implementation.

This research also has some shortcomings which need to be pointed out. First, interviews were conducted at one point in time, which made it more difficult to follow the process of implementation. Since implementation of the job mix started in 2010, some important decisions with regard to implementation have been taken several years ago and interviewees' perceptions and motives might have changed since then. In addition, although great care was taken in the selection of cases and respondents, there is bias towards teachers in the TB-scale and recently appointed school leaders. With regard to teachers this could have led to biased results with regard to perceived implementation. It can be expected for example that teacher that have a higher scale themselves are more positive and knowledgeable about a measure. However, preventing this selection bias was not possible because in most cases, school leaders were not willing to provide access to teachers in a lower scale because of the possible negative influence on organizational atmosphere. With regard to school leaders, interviewing recently appointed school leaders could lead to an overestimation of their influence since the previous school leader often was the main responsible for the implementation. Unfortunately this bias only turned out during the interviews and could therefore not be prevented. Therefore, we interpreted the statements of these school leaders with caution and – when possible – we asked teachers about the role of their previous school leader.

NOTES

[1] This paper was written as Master's thesis for the Research Master in Public Administration & Organizational Science. Wouter Vandenabeele and Paul Boselie were supervisors and Steven van der Walle acted as second reader. I am grateful for their interesting discussions and helpful comments during the research process.

[2] Although institutional theory has many approaches – ranging from the taken-for-granted character of institutional rules and the process by which organizations tend to become instilled with value and social meaning to a range of influences that these processes exert on structural characteristics of organizations (e.g., Oliver, 1991) – this paper focuses on institutional pressures as an *antecedent* to implementation of the job mix.

LITERATURE

Becker. B.E. and M.A. Huselid. 2006. 'Strategic human resources management: Where do we go from here?', *Journal of Marketing Management*, 32, 898-925.

Blatter, J. and M. Haverland. 2008. *Designing case studies: Explanatory approaches in small-N research.* Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Boon, C., J. Paauwe, P. Boselie and D. Den Hartog. 2009. 'Institutional pressures and HRM: developing institutional fit', *Personnel Review*, 38, 5, 492-508.

Boselie, P., G. Dietz and C. Boon. 2005. 'Commonalities and contradictions in HRM and performance research', *Human Resource Management Journal,* 15, 3, 67-94.

Bos-Nehles, A. 2010. *The line makes the difference: Line managers as effective HR partners.* PhD-thesis, Twente University.

Bowen, D.E and C. Ostroff, C. 2004. 'Understanding HRM-firm performance linkages: the role of the „strength" of the HRM system', *Academy of Management Review*, 29, 2, 203-21.

Boyne, G.A., S. Gould-Williams, J. Law and R.M. Walker. 2005. 'Explaining the adoption of innovation: empirical analysis of public management reform', *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy*, 23, 419-35.

Braun, V. and V. Clarke. 2006. 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 2, 77-101.

Bronneman, R. 2011. *Overheid en onderwijsbestel.* Den Haag: SCP.

Child, J. 1972. 'Organizational structure, environment and performance: the role of strategic choice', *Sociology*, 6, 1, 1-22.

Dacin, M.T., J. Goodstein and W.R. Scott. 2002. 'Institutional theory and institutional change: Introduction to the special research forum', *The Academy of Management Journal*, 45, 1, 43-56.

Damanpour, F. 1991. 'Organizational innovation: A meta-analysis of effects of determinants and moderators', *The Academy of Management Journal,* 34, 3, 555-590.

Damanpour, F. and M. Schneider. 2006. 'Phases of the adoption of innovation in organizations: Effects of environment organization and top managers', *British Journal of Management,* 17, 215-236.

Damanpour, F. and M. Schneider. 2008. 'Characteristics of innovation and innovation adoption in public organizations: Assessing the role of managers', *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 19, 495-522.

DiMaggio, P.J. and W.W. Powell. 1983. 'The iron cage revisited: institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields', *American Sociological Review*, 48, 2, 147-169.

Eisenhardt, K.M. 1989. 'Building theories from case study reserach', *The Academy of Management Review,* 14, 4, 532-550.

Garud, R., C. Hardy and S. Maguire. 2007. 'Institutional entrepreneurship as embedded agency: An introduction to the special issue', *Organization Studies*, 28, 7, 957-969.

Geijsel, F., P. Sleegers, R. van den Berg and G. Kelchtermans. 2001. 'Conditions fostering the implementation of large-scale innovation programs in schools: Teachers' perspectives', *Educational Administration Quarterly,* 37, 1, 130-66.

Guest, D. and A. Bos-Nehles. 2013. 'HRM and performance : The role of effective implementation', in J. Paauwe, D. Guest and P. Wright, *HRM and Performance: Achievements and Challenges*, Chichester: Wiley, pp. 79-96.

Klein, K.J. and J.S. Sorra. 1996. 'The challenge of innovation implementation', *The Academy of Management Review,* 21, 4, 1055-1080.

Knies, E. 2012. *Meer waarde voor en door medewerkers: Een longitudinale studie naar de antecedenten en effecten van peoplemanagement.* PhD-thesis, Utrecht University.

Knies, E. and P.L.M. Leisink (forthcoming), 'Leadership behavior in public organizations: a study of supervisory support by police and medical center middle managers', *Review of Public Personnel Administration*.

Kostova, T. and K. Roth. 2002. 'Adoption of an organizational practice by subsidiaries of multinational corporations: institutional and relational effects', *Academy of Management Journal*, 45, 1, 215-233.

Miles, M.B. and A.M. Huberman. 1994. *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Ministry of Education. 2008. *Actieplan LeerKracht van Nederland: Beleidsreactie op het advies van de Commissie Leraren.* Den Haag: Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap.

Ministry of Education. No date. *Functiemix Leerkracht*. Retrieved from www.functiemix.minocw.nl

Oliver, C. 1991. 'Strategic responses to institutional processes', *Academy of Management Review*, 16, 1, 145-179.

Onderwijsraad. 2008. *Partners in onderwijsopbrengst,* Den Haag: Onderwijsraad.

Paauwe, J. 2004. *HRM and Performance: Achieving Long-term Viability*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Paauwe, P. and P. Boselie. 2005. '"Best practices… in spite of performance": just a matter of imitation?', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management,* 16, 6, 987-1003.

Patton, M.Q. 2002. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Purcell, J. and S. Hutchinson. 2007. 'Front-line managers as agents in the HRM-performance causal chain: theory, analysis and evidence', *Human Resource Management Journal*, 17, 1, 3-20.

Purcell, J. and N. Kinnie. 2007. 'HRM and business performance, in P. Boxall, J. Purcell and P. Wright (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Human Resource Management*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 533-551.

Rogers, E. M. 2003. *The diffusion of innovations*, New York: The Free Press.

Seawright, J. and J. Gerring. 2008. 'Case selection techniques in case study research: A menu of qualitative and quantitative options', *Political Research Quarterly*, 61, 2, 294-308.

Van den Broek, J., P. Boselie and J. Paauwe. 2013. 'Multiple institutional logics in health care: Productive ward: "Releasing time to care"', *Public Management Review*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2013.770059

Volbera, H.W. and A.Y. Lewin. 2003. 'Guest editors' introduction: Co-evoluationary dynamics within and between firms: From evolution to co-evolution', *Journal of Management Studies*, 40, 8, 2111-2136.

Wright, P. and L.H. Nishii (2013), 'Strategic HRM and organizational behaviour: integrating multiple levels of analysis', in J. Paauwe, D. Guest and P. Wright, *HRM and Performance: Achievements and Challenges*, Chichester: Wiley, pp. 97–110.