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The Performance and Development of Deliberative Routines: A Practice-Based Ethnographic Study

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ABSTRACT

Deliberation is ubiquitous in street-level work. Scholars and practitioners increasingly promote it, as it has the potential to improve existing practices and procedures and provide customized, yet consistent, services. Little is known, however, about the situated performance of deliberation in street-level work. Drawing on Routine Dynamics Theory and based on an ethnographic study of street-level decision-making in child and family services in the Netherlands (including document analysis, ~300 hours of observations, and interviews in two teams in one organization), we uncover the performance of deliberative routines and their development over time. Demonstrating how contextual factors and the prioritization of particular ends play a role in these routines, we contribute to a better understanding of the dynamic and reflective performance of street-level deliberation. In addition, providing a more nuanced view of routines and elaborating on some possibilities for enabling management thereof, we contribute to a better understanding of the complex and iterative organization of street-level work.

Street-level practitioners do not provide public services alone. Although many studies have focused on individual practitioners and their behavior, street-level decision-making is increasingly understood as a collective practice (Rutz et al. 2017; Sandfort 2000; Wagenaar 2020). Specifically, recent studies have provided important insights into one of the clearest manifestations of a collective element evident in much of the present-day street-level work: *deliberation* (Goldman and Foldy 2015; Møller 2021). Deliberation is a practice in which street-level practitioners jointly explore work problems and discuss possible solutions. This is a topic of importance in research and practice as many street-level bureaucracies have pushed toward increasing cooperation with a variety of peers, both within and across organizations and sectors (e.g., Noonan, Sabel, and Simon 2009; Van Duijn et al. 2018). Deliberation has the potential to improve the process of street-level decision-making by producing a higher degree of consistency across decisions, by increasing responsiveness and creative solutions for citizens, and by making work more purposeful (e.g., Rutz et al. 2017; Visser and Kruyen 2021).

Even though deliberation is receiving increased attention, only few studies have closely examined its everyday dynamics. A comprehensive understanding of the situated performance of deliberation—how street-level practitioners actually engage in deliberative practices as part of their everyday work—is still lacking. Recently, Møller (2021) took an important first step. She put the spotlight on *deliberative routines* by showing which routines street-level workers use to reach shared decisions. Although routines are typically taken for granted, we have known for a long time that both formal and informal routines help to structure street-level practices (Lipsky 2010). A more thorough, sophisticated comprehension of routines for deliberation, therefore, would help us to understand the process and organization of deliberation. In this article, we draw on insights from a strand of research on Routine Dynamics Theory, RDT (e.g., Feldman and Pentland 2003; Feldman et al. 2016). RDT defines organizational routines as *repetitive, recognizable patterns of interdependent actions* (Feldman and Pentland 2003, 95). Every time a routine is performed, it creates the opportunity for individual variation, and, over time, routines can be subjected to structural changes. This approach provides an analytical lens through which to elucidate the shared *sequence of activities* of deliberative routines as part of everyday, *situated* work, so as to contribute to a processual and situated understanding of deliberation. In short, we seek an answer to the question: how and why are deliberative routines performed and developed in particular ways in everyday street-level work? Using the RDT lens, we analyze data from an extensive ethnographic study of child and family services in the Netherlands that includes the observation of 92 performances of a deliberative routine, analysis of policy and organizational documents, and 42 interviews with street-level practitioners, their managers, and municipal policymakers.

Our analysis demonstrates the processes through which street-level practitioners practically, creatively, and reflectively use deliberative routines in their everyday work. Contributing to a theory of deliberation, we elucidate how and why a deliberative routine is performed, develops over time, and deviates from the routine design. With this we further develop Møller's (2021) recent innovative theorizing in this journal. More in particular, we posit two types of factors that inform how

practitioners perform a deliberative routine contextually: their intentions and ends-in-view on the one hand, and seemingly mundane contextual factors like the frequency with which deliberative routes are available, the duration of routes, their physical location, and the relationships among participants orient practitioners' actions on the other. Correcting their image of routines as static, inert practices (Lipsky 2010), we show that street-level routines are used dynamically and potentially reflectively, and that they are likely to be subject to constant change. Our analysis suggests that deviating from an initial design can help street-level practitioners successfully accomplish a routine and their work in general, but that it also comes with serious risks for equal treatment and accountability. Finally, furthering the debate on management of street-level practices, we argue that enabling deliberation is a promising yet complex management practice that requires an ongoing dialogue among practitioners, street-level managers, and local policymakers.

In the following section, we discuss the current literature on street-level work and deliberation and argue that there is a need to further expand our understanding of routines in street-level deliberation, specifically regarding the role of deliberation. We then present the research context of child and family services in the Netherlands along with the study's ethnographic research methods, followed by the findings. Finally, we discuss the implications for theory and practice as well as their limitations and conclude by suggesting avenues for future research.

Theoretical Background

Street-level practitioners (i.e., those actors who work in public or semipublic organizations and directly engage with citizens) make an important contribution to policymaking through the discretion they exercise (Brodkin 2012; Lipsky 2010; Tummers et al. 2015). This exercise of discretion, however, is highly influenced by interaction with peers (Gofen 2013; Keiser 2010; Nisar and Maroulis 2017; Siciliano 2017). In light of this, scholars have recently drawn attention to the role of deliberation in street-level work (Goldman and Foldy 2015; Møller 2021). Although deliberation can be a cognitive, individual practice in which practitioners balance motivations for a specific service or treatment, in these studies the concept specifically refers to deliberation as an interactive, social practice of exploring and discussing encountered problems and possible solutions among street-level practitioners and others working in street-level organizations.

Studies have argued that deliberation helps to diminish experienced uncertainty and provides emotional support (Gofen 2013; Raaphorst 2018). By engaging peers, practitioners mobilize others' knowledge, skills, repertoires, experiences, and perspectives (Møller 2021; Rutz et al. 2017), which helps to filter idiosyncratic judgments, embedded assumptions, and moral dispositions (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003; Raaphorst and Loyens 2020; Zacka 2017). Practitioners might involve managers to gain a mandate for their actions (Rutz et al. 2017), or involve peers to "collectivize" responsibility. Another purpose of deliberation is to explicate reasoning, often with explicit reference to legal frameworks and professional knowledge, contributing to the accountability of decisions (Møller 2021). Lastly, deliberation serves reflection, an iterative practice that is necessary to develop customized and responsive solutions and improve work practices more structurally (Goldman and Foldy 2015; Rutz et al. 2017; Visser and Kruyen 2021).

Although several studies have observed the function of deliberation, only few have examined the nature of deliberation in detail. Deliberation can occur in designated meetings or in ad hoc exchanges between peers and can range from very formal to very informal. Whereas formal meetings have the risk of becoming too time-consuming and inefficient, informal meetings can inhibit transparent and accountable decision processes and outputs (Møller 2021; Rutz et al. 2017). Furthermore, the presence of supervisors can endanger "psychological safety" (Edmondson 1999), whereas peers might contribute to the feeling of safety that is needed to discuss alternatives to standard practices. At the same time, peers create social ties and exert social pressure, possibly leading to the exclusion of relevant perspectives and the sustenance of "groupthink" and the collective enactment of injustice (Møller 2021; Raaphorst and Loyens 2020; Zacka 2017). Lastly, the degree of latitude and the nature of autonomy that practitioners experience influence whether they either turn to their existing repertoire and established relationships in an effort to work efficiently and effectively, or are more likely to develop new routines and relationships with other professionals (Goldman and Foldy 2015).

Several scholars have proposed to—more or less from the top-down—organize deliberation at the street-level to better regulate decision-making. Whereas previous street-level procedures and policy rules aimed to control *the outcome* of street-level decision-making, peer review and procedures for group decision-making have been proposed to restructure *the process* of street-level decision-making (Evans 2020; Rutz and de Bont 2020), perceiving it as an opportunity for new forms of procedural justice (Noonan, Sabel, and Simon 2009; RaadvanState 2016; Sabel et al. 2011). Similarly, Lipsky (2010) suggests building peer review *and* support into the weekly routines of practitioners. Taking those ideas a step further, Møller (2021, 478) observes that deliberation is highly routinized and introduces the concept of *deliberative routines*: "organizational routines that enable deliberation, during which one or more cases are discussed and potentially decided upon." The leveraging of the potential of these "managerial tools," she warns, "require[s] reflexive awareness and skillful orchestration" (Møller 2021, 482). Møller (2021) and Goldman and Foldy (2015) also point to the need to trace deliberation and determine the influence of time, place, and space. Following these suggestions, we extend theories of deliberation and deliberative routines by systematically analyzing a multitude of performances of deliberative routines, demonstrating their situated and processual nature and the role of time and place in their performance and development. This in turn allows us to make additional suggestions for how deliberation can be organized and managed.

Long ago, street-level literature uncovered practitioners' routines in the form of informal practices used to cope with everyday dilemmas (Lipsky 2010). Routine activities are said to form the bulk of street-level work, together with *ordinary, nonroutine cases* which "cannot be handled promptly but fall within the range of situations that street-level bureaucrats are familiar with" (Zacka 2017, 71). By and large, street-level literature has understood routines in terms of heuristics that enable street-level bureaucrats to cope with the pressures they

experience, saving time and cognitive resources. Routines are treated as inert, tacit, unquestioned work activities (Lipsky 2010; Moore 1987; Sandfort 2000). Being perceived as "structure" and highlighting their static and "institutionalized" nature, street-level theories have hardly reflected upon the way organizational routines come into being, how they work, how they relate, and how they might change.

We draw on RDT (Feldman et al. 2016) in Organizational Theory to better understand the performance and development of deliberative routines. This strand of research puts its focus on shared practices and defines routines as "repetitive, recognizable *patterns* of interdependent actions, carried out by multiple actors" (Feldman and Pentland 2003, 95). By foregrounding actions, this approach draws attention to how "the routinized character of most social activity is something that has to be 'worked at' continually by those who sustain it in their day-to-day conduct" (Giddens 1984, 86). In the everyday *performances* of routines lie the possibility for variation or improvisation in response to the specific situation and the specific actors involved (Feldman et al. 2016). These variations might be necessary to accomplish the same pattern (Pentland and Rueter 1994). Yet, variation intentionally or unintentionally might also lead to the production of new or different patterns (D'Adderio 2014), possibly deviating from the way they were designed (Suchman 1987), which we refer to in our study as *routine development*.

With this perspective of routines, RDT offers four important insights for further analysis of the routinized performance of deliberation. First, it draws attention to the dynamic or processual nature of routines, providing insights into how and why routines remain stable or change by looking at the *internal dynamics of routines*. Second, RDT specifically analyzes routines as *situated* practice, arguing that "context and routines are mutually constituted as they are performed, enacted, reproduced, and changed" (Feldman et al. 2016, 510). In this way, RDT draws attention to the material, spatial, temporal, and social features that form the organizational context of the routine and how these inform routine performances and development (D'Adderio 2014).

Third, a further theoretical contribution lies in its observation that externally defined goals do not *determine* actors' actions, just as practitioners' intentions and their orientation toward organizational goals also inform routine performance (Howard-Grenville 2005). Actors develop *ends-in-view*, meaning ends that *they* have in view in a specific routine performance that are constitutive of their actions (Dittrich and Seidl 2018). These ends-in-view can be informed by and aligned with the preestablished organizational goals referred to as *purposeful* action, or they can be directed toward coping with the immediate circumstances unrelated to the preestablished goal or overall, longer-term outcome, referred to as *purposive* action (Dittrich and Seidl 2018). Fourth, RDT has demonstrated that each time a routine is performed there is an occasion for reflective talk (Bucher and Langley 2016; Dittrich, Guérard, and Seidl 2016). This collective reflection might merely concern the mismatch between actions that are needed and the routine-as-designed, thereby justifying the need to adjust actions to meet the circumstances. However, it becomes especially interesting when reflective talk concerns variations in the routine's pattern, its evaluation, and leads to the decision to perform the routine differently in the future (Dittrich, Guérard, and Seidl 2016).

Research Context and Methods

Research Context

Within the more general context of increased cooperation and attention to deliberation in the delivery of public services, we should say something about the nature of and current developments in child and family services where this study was conducted. Whereas before 2015 responsibility for different domains of child and family services in the Netherlands was dispersed over three levels of government, as of 2015 the responsibility for the whole continuum of child and family services—ranging from educational advice to child protection, and from behavioral therapy to services for mental or physical disabilities—was integrated and decentralized to municipalities. The decentralization was accompanied by considerable austerity measures. The national Youth Act of 2015 specified that services should aim to be customized, capacitating, integrated, preventative, demedicalized and local. This development does not stand on its own as many European welfare states are undergoing similar developments (Hemerijck 2013; Morel, Palier, and Palme 2011). Preceded by an extensive collaborative process with government agencies, professional associations, beneficiaries, and other stakeholders, the national policy design included much discretionary space for municipalities and suggested teamwork and collective decision-making to strengthen professional discretion at the local level.

Within this larger context, this study was conducted in the municipality of Dunetown (a pseudonym) and its local Child and Family Center Dunewater (also a pseudonym, henceforth called CJG, the abbreviation of *Centrum voor Jeugd en Gezin—Center for Youth and Nuclear Family*). Dunetown commissioned the CJG, which was already responsible for child health services (JGZ, *Jeugd GezondheidsZorg*), to provide primary educational advice and assign child and family services either to a specialized provider or to their own primary services (the latter were expected to decrease costs). Within CJG Dunewater, approximately 60 street-level child and family practitioners, forming six teams, are responsible for allocating and providing child and family services. Within these teams, practitioners with various disciplinary backgrounds are expected to work together to develop solutions for complex family problems. These practitioners all have a higher professional degree in pedagogical or social services. Their varied expertise ranges from street-corner work, educational advice, child health care, child mental health services, legally mandated child protection, and probation services. Dunewater is an atypical organization, as it has taken various innovative and exceptional measures to promote and legally formalize discretionary room (VNG 2018). The practitioners have wide degrees of discretion to allocate customized services, including the legal mandate to allocate services and corresponding expenditures on behalf of the municipality, and few formal procedures or rules for accessibility.

There are two types of teams in CJG Dunewater. Team 1 functions as a front office, dealing with questions from families and other professionals. It is also their responsibility to judge requests for support from either parents or other child welfare providers and then allocate appropriate child and family services. Team 2 provides primary educational advice to families. They are responsible for supporting a network of local schools and social organizations so that possible problems are flagged and referred to them at an early

stage. When support is no longer adequate or when a school within their network asks for help, they are responsible for allocating child and family services. Both types of teams work in separate offices located in the area in which they work. The teams work independently, with little managerial interference.

A team of *coaches* supports the practitioners. With their university degree in pedagogical science or psychology and work experience, these coaches have ample (theoretical) expertise in the treatment of children and can therefore be consulted for either complex cases or professional development. Furthermore, the coaches are involved in organizational and policy developments. Relatively new, the role of coach was developed to support practitioners confronted with increased discretionary room and demands for customization. All in all, the practitioners at CJG present multiple "traditional" characteristics of street-level bureaucrats, as they are directly responsible for communication with and allocation of services to clients and are faced with budget and time scarcities in doing so. Simultaneously, the practitioners are given considerable discretionary space not only to deal with clients but also to deal with time and budget and they are in the midst of a process of professionalization, all emerging developments in street-level organizations. Given the attention to collaboration and organization within interdisciplinary teams, the goal to develop customized solutions, and the large degree of granted discretionary room in practitioners' work at CJG Dunewater, we expected deliberation to be important for the practitioners. Therefore, this is a well-suited case to explore the situated performance of deliberative routines.

Generating and Accessing Data

This study is based on organizational ethnographic fieldwork (van Hulst, Ybema, and Yanow 2017; Ybema et al. 2009). Such fieldwork, with its focus on long-term engagement and its reliance on observation, allows for the study of everyday actions that actors engage in as part of their work practices (Nicolini 2012). Ethnographers observe and analyze the context in which activities are enacted, contributing to an understanding of the situatedness of everyday work practices. Ethnographic methods are specifically apt for analyzing routines and any changes therein, "as ethnographers draw close enough to observe the precariousness of such processes, stay long enough to see change occurring, and are contextually sensitive enough to understand the twists and turns that are part of organizational life …" (van Hulst, Ybema, and Yanow 2017, 223).

Observational data were collected during approximately 300 hours of *observation* between December 2016 and December 2017. Exploratory conversations indicated that some deliberations were planned and had a formal nature, whereas others were unplanned and informal. Two strategies for observation were therefore employed. The first involved regularly asking the practitioners and managers which meetings were planned and attending and observing those. The second entailed a daily presence at the office to observe the unplanned and informal interactions. Over the course of four months, 16 practitioners from two teams were shadowed during the course of their regular work day. The two teams represented the two different types of teams, opening up the possibility for ethnographic comparison (Simmons and Smith 2019). Such a comparison encompasses looking for possible differences, exceptions, or inconsistencies that could shed light on or challenge possible interpretations of the findings.

To understand deliberation as part of the larger work routine, the fieldworker observed phone shifts, house visits and face-to-face meetings with families, interactions with other service providers and schools, and registration and referral practices (a statement on the positionality of the fieldworker can be found in Supplementary Appendix 1). The observations were supplemented with dozens of daily *informal conversations* with those involved to clarify their actions (Spradley 1997). During observation and informal conversation, detailed field notes were made and speech was written down as much as possible (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). Policy and organizational documents were analyzed to map how deliberation was envisioned, designed, and organized.

In addition, the fieldworker conducted a total of 42 *semistructured interviews* (each lasting between 1 and 2 hours): 15 with practitioners and 27 with their managers and municipal policymakers (an overview of the research participants can be found in Supplementary Appendix 2; interview guides can be found in Supplementary Appendix 3). The practitioners who were interviewed were the same individuals that we observed to further grasp the "intentions of" activities that determined the allocation of services in general, and the activities of deliberation in particular. We interviewed every CJG manager and involved municipal policymaker to understand the management of street-level decision-making, the organization of deliberation and registration, and their own participation and role in deliberation. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The different data were brought into "conversation" with each other for triangulation and negative-case analysis. Finally, interactive sessions to discuss the findings with the different groups of actors in later stages of the project served the purpose of member feedback (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2009).

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data was done abductively, in an iterative cycle between data and theory (Klag and Langley 2013). Initial analysis began during fieldwork. This first phase consisted of multiple rounds of open and more focused coding (Corbin and Strauss 1990). After fieldwork had finalized, we realized that there was a limited understanding of the situated use of deliberation in the street-level theories, so we decided to analyze the data from that point of view. The second phase of analysis started with an initial routine design based on a central policy document.

We then analyzed the observation data and identified 92 performances of a deliberative routine. We ordered these performances chronologically and compared the actions that were taken, looking for differences, similarities, and changes over time. Through an iterative process of comparing the different performances, which can be understood as a cross-case analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994), we grouped, refined, renamed, and regrouped the actions that together formed the situated use of the routine and the deviations from the initial routine design. Next, we searched for explanations for the differences between the design and the actual performance. We did this by comparing the two teams and their different deliberative patterns, and by combining the observations with interviews that gave insight into the ends-in-view and other motivations of the practitioners. This went hand in hand

with a theoretical exploration of routine dynamics. Finally, we sought to explain how developments came into being. All the while, we engaged in a dialogue in which the second author challenged the fieldworker to think through alternative descriptions and explanations of patterns arising from the analysis (more information on the analytical process can be found in Supplementary Appendix 4).

Findings

At CJG Dunewater, practitioners engage in deliberation as part of allocating child and family services. In the following four subsections, we analyze (1) how deliberation is embedded in an initial routine design spurring its everyday use; (2) how practitioners use the deliberative routine in their work and which five deviations become new patterns-in-use; (3) how two types of contextual factors contribute to the everyday use and deviations from the deliberative routine; and (4) how new routine patterns-in-use develop through two types of processes. Between the first two (sub)sections we have included an example of situated use of a deliberative routine. We finish with a process depiction of the performance and development of the routine.

Deliberation in Routine Design

Before we can properly analyze how a deliberative routine is performed and developed in street-level work, we need to understand how deliberation was envisioned and organized at CJG Dunewater. For this, we reconstructed the initial routine design through which deliberation was embedded in practitioners' key practice of allocating child and family services.

Allocation is an important part of practitioners' work, as it defines which citizen receives which type of care from whom. To accomplish allocation, CJG Dunewater developed a guideline that includes a description of organizational goals and an organizational routine to be used (CJG 2015). The guideline was commissioned and developed by five municipalities in the region at the beginning of 2015, shortly after the CJG had assumed its new tasks and responsibilities. It was developed together with child health care practitioners, child protection practitioners, and general health practitioners and was intended to standardize decision-making in the region and manage expenditures, while contributing to the purposes of the decentralization of child and family services: providing support that is timely, capacitating, collaborative and, where possible, demedicalized and local. Furthermore, an important aim was to promote "demand-oriented customization" in which allocation was not based on indications of whether a family fits existing treatments from existing, contracted providers, but on customization. The idea was that this could be achieved if practitioners start from the question: "What commitment and expertise contribute in this case to capacitating the family to deal with their problems and is, in this situation, necessary to achieve results for the child and family?" (CJG 2015, 2). Lastly, central to CJG decision-making is the principle of "three pairs of eyes," in which the practitioner's decision is made with the family and is supported by deliberation with other professionals. Included in the guideline was a "deliberation form" that the CJG developed to achieve *and* document deliberation, which included a list of topics to be discussed and ample space to write down what was discussed per topic.

The routine design for allocation, as suggested in the guideline, consists of five steps: question clarification; deliberation; matching; filling out the deliberation form; and finally registering, referring, and informing the family. In *question clarification* the practitioners are expected to explore and frame the family's question together with the family. *Deliberation* involves *professional reflection* on the case to develop an understanding of what the family needs and what support will help satisfy that, including an exploration of alternative solutions. Through *matching*, the practitioner chooses whether existing services fit the question and contacts the corresponding provider to check the match and availability. The explicit advice is to do matching after deliberation so as to reflect on what the family needs and not on what is provided. The fourth step consists of *filling out* the deliberation form. Lastly, the practitioner *registers* the case in the online registration system, *refers* the family in the registration system to an internal practitioner or external provider, and *informs* the family about this allocation (CJG 2015). We have displayed the sequence in figure 1.

In the guideline, two routes were defined for deliberation. The first route, *direct desk deliberation*, centralizes interaction between peers. The CJG organized the practitioners in multidisciplinary teams, sharing a general base of professional knowledge and skills, but also having individual expertise. The organization in teams was intended to enable and stimulate regular and on-the-spot deliberation. There was no protocol to indicate which team member to deliberate with or when. The CJG also designed a second initial route, the *collective coach conferences*, during which the practitioners make use of their assigned coach and several peers. The guideline indicated that the coach had to be involved in complex cases, customized or specialized solutions, and in cases where the safety of the child might be at stake (CJG 2015).

In addition, shortly after that policy was implemented, the CJG added a third meeting. The *access assembly* would bring together a municipal policymaker, a manager, a coach, and several expert practitioners to solve and learn from complex cases. This meeting's purpose was to "instigate the learning capacity of the organization" (Interview XXII). The idea was that it could be used to discuss and

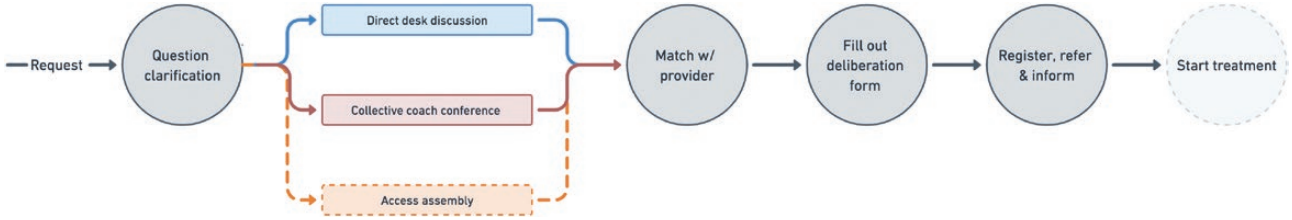

Figure 1 The Initial Design for the Deliberative Routine.

decide on novel solutions in specific cases, but also to identify more systemic problems in contracting, regulation, and policy. Scheduled every 2 weeks, practitioners were expected to submit a case and a corresponding request beforehand for the meeting's agenda. With the routine design, CJG Dunewater embedded deliberation—and therewith the possibility to develop customized solutions—into the larger routine. From thereon, the design needed to be put into practice.

Situated Performance of the Deliberative Routine

Online we offer Linda's case (Supplementary Appendix 5). This case illustrates how the deliberative routine works. This case is but one of 92 performances of the deliberative routine that we observed. Analysis of those 92 cases, complemented by interview data helped us expose patterns of routine performance that deviate significantly from the way it was designed. We identify five types of deviations: (1) developing new deliberative routes; (2) combining deliberative routes; (3) blurring steps; (4) limited use of the deliberation form and incomplete documentation; and (5) changing participation in routes. These deviations became the new patterns-in-use 2 years after the guideline was designed. We modeled the situated performance of the routine in figure 2.

First, in everyday performances, new routes came into use in addition to the existing direct desk discussion, collective coach conferences, and access assemblies (in figure 2 numbered route 1, route 5, and route 6, respectively). One of the new routes was the *casual coach call* (route 2), which consists of an informal talk with a coach, often quickly after having received a request. The coach call followed some of the suggestions for collective coach conferences as they were used for the same issues and the coach partly followed the deliberation form. Yet, they were one-on-one, not registered, and brief. Another route that was used was the *mobile management meeting* (route 3), an informal, one-on-one talk with a manager, often performed soon after receiving the request and handled by phone. Generally, the practitioners involved managers when they had doubts or questions about existing regulations and rule-breaking, about financial coverage or contracting, or when there were issues with municipal policymakers. There were no suggestions for when or how to use this route.

For another new route, one of the two teams included deliberation about cases in formal team meetings held every week. These *team talks* (route 4) were rather similar to direct desk discussions as they only involved peers and were flexible and accessible. Yet, they were different because they included more participants, were more extensively documented, and were conducted within the limited time frame of the meeting. In rare cases, practitioners involved a policymaker in what we call a *policy chat* (route 7). Policy chats occurred mostly when policy or contracting rules were unclear. These chats were conducted by phone or email, were short, and lacked suggestions that guided the interaction. Finally, in some cases the practitioners did not deliberate at all (route 0). This happened when there was a freely accessible type of support available and families were referred there without needing allocation. Practitioners also did not deliberate when practitioners from other providers requested an extension of existing treatment. The routes are diagrammed in figure 2.

A second deviation from the guideline entails the combination of routes (routes 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 4.1, 4.2, 5.1, and 6.1). Many routes were combined with either direct desk discussion or team talk, indicating that practitioners often first deliberated with a peer before deciding to deliberate with an individual coach, manager, or policymaker, or with a collective in which coaches, managers, or policymakers participate (routes 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 4.1, and 4.2). Access assemblies and policy chats were rarely performed as a single route, but tended to be combined (routes 6, 6.1, 7, 7.1, 1.3). And finally, there were cases that were discussed in almost all routes, sometimes going back and forth between them (route 1.3).

Third, in contrast to the way the routine was designed on paper, deliberation was not a clearly demarcated step in the larger routine. The initial design emphasized a clear boundary between deliberation and matching to ensure new solutions would be tried rather than having the practitioners

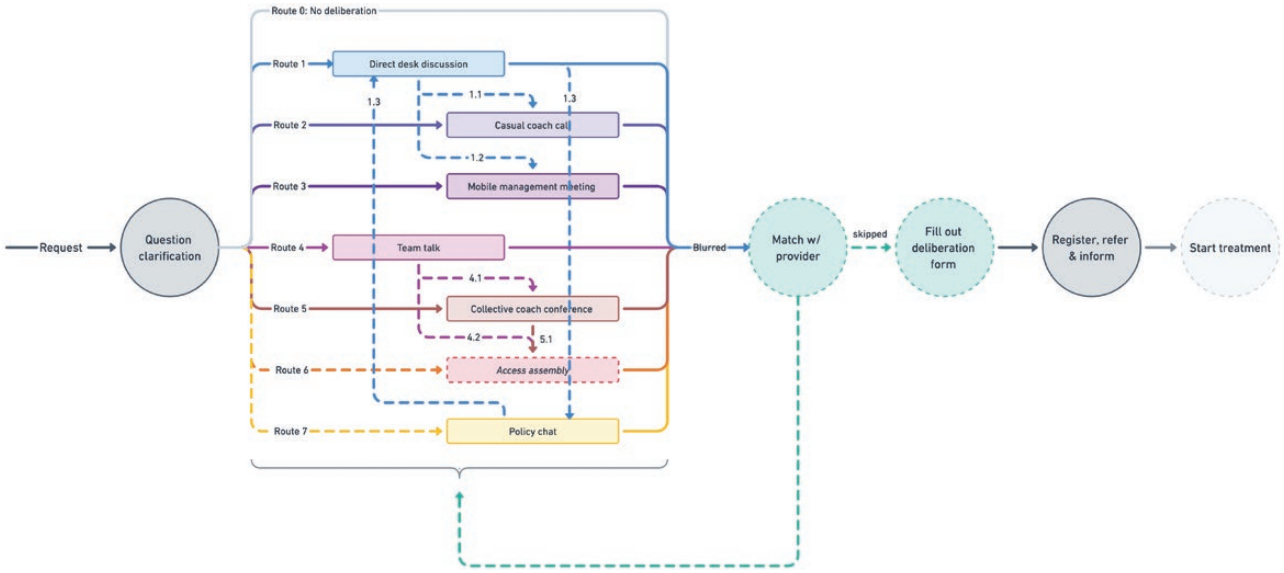

Figure 2 Situated Performance of the Deliberative Routine.

think only in terms of existing treatments and providers. In practice, we observed practitioners blurring these steps because, in part, discussing possible new solutions necessarily entailed knowing which providers and services existed and were contracted, whether they had availability, what specific services entailed to establish a fit, and a possible new solution: stacking existing services. Similarly, practitioners went back and forth between deliberation, question clarification, and registration, while attempting to successfully allocate services in specific cases. Thus, in everyday performances, deliberation was used partly simultaneously and partly in combination with the other steps.

Fourth, the deliberation form that was supposed to guide and document deliberation fell into disuse. Although the practitioners themselves believed they applied the deliberation form and felt no need to consult or register it, in practice differences were observed in the extent to which the topics on the form were actually discussed. For example, in Linda's case, the practitioners thoroughly discussed possible contributions and solutions and considered the families' concerns and preferences. However, less explicit attention was paid to their knowledge of effective interventions, costs, and contractual forms. In general, as the deliberation form was not consulted, treatment of the topics became less structured. Only the more formal routes (team talk, collective coach conference, and access assembly) included the making and registration of minutes, including motivations and considerations that were discussed. In others, only the final decision with its motivation was documented.

A last deviation was changing participation in the routes. This happened particularly to the access assembly, which the municipal policymaker started to attend less frequently. The policymaker wanted to restructure and decrease communication with the CJG and become less involved in individual family cases, explaining: "I was the main point of contact. Now, I am more distanced. I consult with the management, sometimes join a meeting to discuss complex cases. […] It was too much. It is better now, we have to do it together, think along. We're still searching how to organize it properly" (Interview XXI).

The five deviations we have identified show a complexification, a simplification, and an informalization of the deliberative routine, in which—at first sight—important elements seem to be lost, including particular perspectives, time to discuss cases extensively, the discussion of specific topics, and proper documentation. The question is why the deliberative routes developed and deviated from the routine design. We teased out various factors that play a role.

Factors Contributing to the Performance of the Deliberative Routine

Several factors emerge from the data that help us understand why the situated performance of the deliberative routine diverged from the routine design. First, practitioners performed the routine in certain ways based on the *ends* they pursued. The central, organizational goal was the allocation of customized services. The guideline suggested a routine design to enable this goal. Yet, customization implied all kinds of new complexities for practitioners' decision-making which in turn created new purposes that practitioners set for themselves, as *ends-in-view.* These were sometimes aligned with or related to the complexities of the goal of customization, whereas at other times they were less related to them. Additionally, the routine design did not always contribute to achieving the goal, when aspects were missing or made too complex.

A first end-in-view, informed by the goal of customization and consecutive discretionary space, was to make sense of cases in this new and more complex situation, which was different than initially envisioned. Discussing the necessary treatment *before* considering existing treatments and providers (as the routine prescribed) proved to conflict with actual case processing. Practitioners did not start from a "blank sheet," but created an overview of existing treatments and providers, experiences with them, their suitability, and their availability in their discussions with others. A practitioner explains: "In this case, we found that the existing treatments, the existing providers, none of them offered what this boy needed. It was only after establishing this, after this realization, that we started to develop something new" (Interview X). Also, deliberation, matching, and registration regularly led to demands for a clearer understanding of the clients' needs and situation and possibly also refinement of the clients' questions. Consequently, the order of routine actions as designed slowly became more complex in practice.

A second end-in-view that developed in light of customization was to acquire *additional perspectives*. Additional perspectives allowed them to explore alternative, customized solutions. For example, during a direct desk discussion, the practitioners discussed the possibility of combining treatments for a multilayered request of a family in the midst of an antagonistic divorce, yet desired more expertise to decide whether part of the treatment could be done internally through primary educational advice (observation January 17, 2017). Third, customization spurred practitioners to search for *a mandate* in terms of additional financing and alternative contracting. For this purpose, practitioners often included deliberation with a manager or policymaker at the end of the process.

Fourth, practitioners attempted to deal with *increased uncertainties* resulting from the far-reaching decisions they had to make both for the family and in terms of budget, decisions that often had to be made without clear rules and sometimes even by breaking rules. During one observation, a practitioner confided: "I just got off the phone with the municipality, but the answer remains vague. I'll call [name manager] again, because I don't know what to do with this" (observation February 21, 2017). The latter three ends-in-view drove practitioners in their performance of new routes and in the combination of routes.

Accomplishing deliberation in itself became an end-in-view. The guideline prescribed deliberation, but proved to be an incomplete answer. Managers and policymakers had not yet really settled on the right organization of deliberation either, as illustrated by the managers' participation in informally added routes. This was further aggravated by practitioners' informal deviations that lacked standards to begin with, leading to occasional searches for the proper space to deliberate about specific issues. In their efforts to move things along, they made phone calls until they reached someone who could provide them with a definite answer.

Beyond the goals of customization and deliberation, the practitioners were eager to complete the routine in an organized, comprehensive, and timely fashion. One practitioner explained: "I don't really like putting it off for a very long time. I just want to have an answer myself […] I ask my questions to the people I think can provide a normal answer

quickly" (Interview IV). Performing the routine in the quickest possible way helped them keep their work organized, as they always had a pending list of allocation requests waiting to be completed. The practitioners also preferred to allocate services timely to help the family without letting them wait. A practitioner explained: "We don't have to do it this quickly. Look, you have six weeks from request to allocation and that is workable. But I don't like to let the family wait. Sometimes it's urgent but even if it's not, I wouldn't want to wait that long for an answer either" (Interview VI). We observed that practitioners often first discussed cases with the team member that was present, asking: "Do you have a moment to think along?" When direct desk discussion did not suffice, they generally preferred an immediate phone call over waiting for the next scheduled meeting.

Finally, the timely completion of the routine could also lead to its simplification. The practitioners did not refer to the deliberation form or fill it out, as they believed the questions on the form were already integrated into their everyday performance; "In principle, the questions from the form, we already do that in our conversations. We are already going to fully consider [the questions] whether help has been provided before, has it been good or not, have parents been satisfied with it? […] You know, one way or another those questions, that reflection, is completely within us" (Interview III). The ends-in-view that influenced the practitioners' exercise of the routine were partly informed by the new requirement to customize *and* the new requirements to deliberate, combining a prioritization of the client with organizing their work.

Other factors that oriented practitioners' performances—and their divergence from the routine design—could be called contextual. These factors included the frequency of available routes, the duration of routes, the physical location of, and the relationships among participants in routes. The end-in-view of a timely completion of the routine was partly informed by the contextual *means*. For example, Team 2 spent much time outside the office, at families' homes, or in interdisciplinary meetings with professionals from other organizations. They walked in and out of their office and irregularly encountered colleagues for deliberation. For Team 2, the formal team meeting provided a fixed moment to include multiple perspectives in their otherwise physically dispersed work routine.

Team 1 used direct desk discussion for the same purpose. As a practitioner from Team 1 explained: "We work in shifts together, so we always have someone in front of us to quickly deliberate with" (Interview III). In addition, as a coach was often present at the office, Team 2 made use of the casual coach call as a shortcut to reflect or simply fulfill the requirement of deliberation. We often heard a variation on the sentence: "As you are here, can we discuss…?" Team 1 preferred to call the coach on the phone for a quick answer, with the consequence that documentation was limited. Finally, Team 2 rarely used the access assembly because it was held in Team 1's office. Team 2 therefore attempted to solve cases as much as possible through collective coach conferences and only attended the access assembly when it was absolutely necessary, thereby explaining the development of route 5.1.

Finally, the participants in specific routes and the relationships practitioners have with them constituted an important means that oriented the performance of the deliberative routine. Peers provided the opportunity to ask for help and created confidence about possible solutions. A practitioner explained: "When I'm in doubt, I always involve a peer. As long as I feel a little bit of doubt, a glimpse, I always deliberate with my peers and that is why it is very nice that you are always in pairs" (Interview II). Another practitioner said: "We're a small team […] and we're well attuned to each other. There is very little that we don't know of each other. We share things like that" (Interview VIII). The deliberations in direct desk discussion or team talk prepared the practitioners to reflect on a case with superiors.

The importance of involving peers over other means can also be observed in Team 1's scarce use of the collective coach conference. The practitioners expressed their discomfort with their coach as they felt she disapproved of the issues they submitted. As a result, they preferred to make casual coach calls to other coaches or phone peers from other teams with specific expertise to avoid having to deliberate with their coach. Practitioners' relationships thus contributed to their choices for routes and the combination of routes. All in all, the way the routine was performed and the choices that were made had real consequences for the process through which important decisions on the allocation of services were made. The performance of the deliberative routine along with their deviations was instigated by practitioners' pursuits to make sense, involve multiple perspectives, acquire a mandate, and deal with uncertainty in complex cases of customization. Additionally, practitioners also needed to manage their work load, complete the routine in a timely fashion and simply complete the process and make a decision, all of it importantly guided by contextual factors such as the time, place, and relationships of those involved in the deliberation.

Patterns and Reflection-on-Action

During our observations, several new patterns-in-use were developing, which allowed us to identify and analyze the two processes through which such patterns come into being. In the first process, practitioners deviated from the guideline in specific performances. The specific diversions were repeated in subsequent performances by other practitioners, who were informally yet collectively altering the routine in the process. This happened, for example, with the use of the access assembly. Over time, we observed the decreasing presence of the municipal policymaker, thereby reorienting the practitioners' use. In the beginning, the access assembly was used regularly and it resulted in quick decisions. Slowly, with the absence of the policymaker, cases were routed through policy chats, mobile management meetings, and then back into the access assembly, as decisions failed to be made without the right participants and consecutive expertise and mandate. Practitioners complained to each other and became reluctant to use the assembly. In the following months, practitioners started to refrain from submitting cases. They experimented with using alternative routes directly, which in several cases resulted in quicker decisions. A new pattern of the routine started to develop through repetition and retainment of the deviations.

A second process through which new patterns-in-use developed was through collective reflection on the deliberative routine. In these reflections, practitioners talked about specific routine performances and the recurring pattern they had observed, discussing advantages and disadvantages of what was happening and what they did. In these reflections practitioners decided to make changes to the routine, but such changes were not formalized. For example, while discussing

cases in team talk, members of Team 2 voiced issues they had experienced, stating: "I can't talk well under time pressure," or "we have to introduce cases carefully" (observation March 2, 2017). This led the team to discuss the practice of team talk. Some practitioners argued that the team meetings were already pressed for time and that spending time on deliberating cases might not be efficient. Moreover, they expressed their concerns about the need to properly introduce and discuss the cases and the lack of time to do so during team talk. Although most agreed with both issues, some argued that the plurality of opinions in team talk was very valuable to their work. In addition, by maintaining team talk, the practitioners had multiple opportunities over 2 weeks to deliberate, ensuring a timely answer and not having to "swim in a vacuum" (observation March 2, 2017). The issue remained unresolved during the specific discussion but received further attention in the months that followed.

In sum, either through processes of deviation, repetition, and retainment, or through processes of reflective talk, practitioners—tacitly or consciously—changed the pattern of the deliberative routine. What is interesting here is the role of CJG managers in these processes. Managers were sometimes participants in the deliberative routes, and in that capacity also participated in the individual and repeated variations of the deliberative routine. This was not translated into a new formal guideline, possibly also due to the absence of managers and policymakers in the collective reflections on routine performances and patterns. At this point, we can take a final step in our analysis by developing a more abstract depiction of how the deliberative routine was performed and evolved.

A Process Depiction of Deliberative Routines' Performance and Development

What we see is that the motivation for street-level practitioners to perform a deliberative routine as part of their everyday work is a routine design (figure 3). The initial design, as we encountered it, starts with a particular organizational goal and, especially, an organizational infrastructure together with more or less specific guidelines and other artifacts to pursue such a goal.

Guidelines, however, are action sequences *on paper*. Practitioners perform them in a specific context dealing with specific cases. In part, what this means is that practitioners are dealing with tensions between the routine-as-designed and what is feasible in practice. Moreover, it means that practitioners are developing new parts of the routine to better serve the intentions that develop in action, which can be more or less informed by and in line with preestablished goals and the immediate circumstances. Speedier routes in the deliberative routine, for instance, help to better serve the clients and keep work manageable. What was kept separate or offered as alternatives on paper might be combined in practice to deal with complexity and ambiguity, leading to more complicated pathways. Some elements of an original routine might be dropped, as they do not fit into the way work is actually done or just seem purposeless to practitioners. The shaping role of practitioners' intentions and particular ends-in-view are included in figure 3.

In dealing with the immediate circumstances, the temporal, social, and spatial contexts guide the modifications (as shown by the different patterns-in-use between Teams 1 and 2). Contextual factors and ends-in-view influence each other. For example, the notion of duration/waiting and physical location of a deliberative route are related to the need to develop a solution quickly, both to keep work orderly and comprehensible and to help families quickly. Our study shows us how new routine patterns emerge. This patterning is often the result of the repetition and retention of specific deviations as changes to the routine. At times, reflective talk about routines plays a part in this process. Reflective talk can be prompted by the situated use itself, or by the newly emerging pattern. It can be part of performing the deliberative routine, or it can get shape outside the time or space of the deliberative routine. Either way, it can be an important force in developing the deliberative routine.

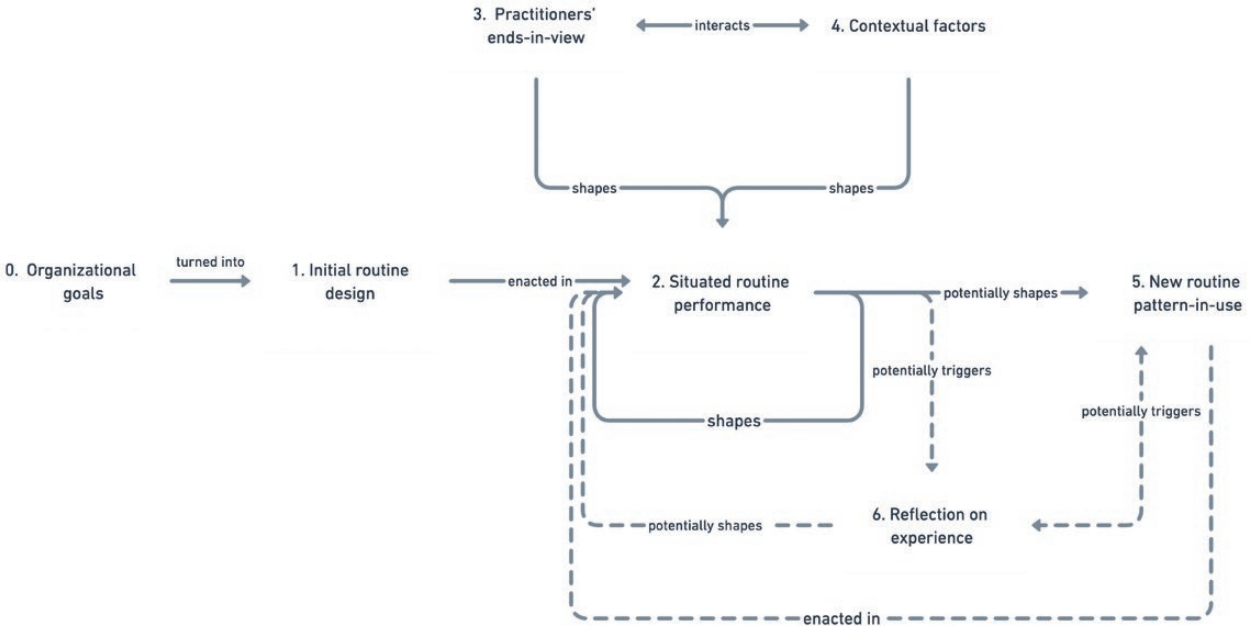

Figure 3 The Process of Deliberative Routine Performance and Development.

Discussion and Conclusion

Deliberation in street-level work is increasingly recognized as contributing to shared, responsive *and* consistent decision-making (Lipsky 2010; Rutz et al. 2017; Zacka 2017). It is also acknowledged that *how* deliberation is performed shapes the outcome of public service delivery (Goldman and Foldy 2015; Møller 2021; Raaphorst and Loyens 2020). Therefore, it is important to expand present knowledge on the day-to-day performance of deliberation as embedded in the larger routines of street-level decision-making.

Although research on street-level deliberation has touched on its temporal, spatial, relational, and purposive aspects, we significantly extend previous research. We do this by asking an important question that had remained partly unanswered: how and why are deliberative routines performed and developed in particular ways in everyday street-level work? Following Møller (2021) in focusing on deliberative routines, and making more extensive use of insights from RDT (e.g., Feldman et al. 2016), we elucidate how and why a deliberative routine is performed, how it develops over time, and how and why this deviates from the routine design.

Contributing to a theory of deliberation in street-level literature, we posit two types of factors that inform how practitioners perform a deliberative routine in a specific context dealing with specific cases. First, street-level workers make use of the intentions *they* have and the ends *they* have in view for themselves or for a particular performance (Dittrich and Seidl 2018). These intentions and ends-in-view inform how deliberation is performed, quite possibly resulting in particular stable variations (routes as we called them) of a routine and new patterns of the routine as such. In a particular performance of deliberation, larger organizational goals embedded in the routine design are accompanied by and might compete with goals the practitioners have and which might or might not match those of the organization. More specifically, aiming for customized services has contributed to certain purposeful ends-in-view such as the different sense-making processes, the need for additional perspectives and mandates, and dealing with new uncertainties and ambiguities, besides purposive ends-in-view such as the timely and organized completion of the routine. This explanation goes beyond personal motives, coping, or pursuing predefined goals, rather arguing that intentionality develops in action. Furthermore, it goes beyond either prioritizing clients' needs or saving cognitive and temporal resources, showing how these are intrinsically connected in the ends that practitioners pursue.

Second, seemingly mundane contextual factors play an important role in the performance of deliberative routines and in the emerging ends-in-view: the frequency with which deliberative routes are available, the duration of routes, their physical location, and the relationships among participants in routes orient practitioners' actions. Ends-in-view and contextual factors develop in tandem (Dittrich and Seidl 2018). As deliberative routines are inherently situated, "enacted in and inseparable from their sociomaterial context" (Feldman et al. 2016, 506), the intentional, temporal, spatial, and relational aspects of everyday street-level work should therefore be carefully considered in the study and practice of street-level deliberation.

A second contribution to a theory of deliberation in street-level decision-making comprises new insights into how the everyday performance of deliberation—informed by factors uncovered—might lead to deviations from the routine design and possibly to the development of new routine patterns. We identified five deviations: (1) developing new deliberative routes; (2) combining deliberative routes; (3) blurring steps; (4) limited use of the deliberation form and incomplete documentation; and (5) changing participation in routes. Individual variations can, over time, alter the pattern of the deliberative routine. Through repeated performance, street-level practitioners structure the deliberative routine as a *pattern-in-use*. This might lead to formal or informal modifications. In addition, new deliberative patterns might also arise as the result of collective reflection (Dittrich, Guérard, and Seidl 2016). What is interesting to notice here is that most of the recent interest in increased deliberation in street-level work has focused on the way street-level decisions have become the object of group discussion. We argue that the deliberative routines within which decisions are made *themselves* are reflected upon as well. In sum, the image of routines for deliberation that arises from our observations is a dynamic one. We see practitioners as a group, practically, creatively, and reflectively using deliberative routines to reach an organization's purposes as well as their own, keeping some routine elements intact while structurally altering others.

Beyond a thorough, sophisticated understanding of the situated performance and change of deliberation, this study contributes to street-level literature in general by providing a nuanced and complex description of organizational routines in (semi)public organizations. Correcting their image of routines as static, inert practices, we show that street-level routines are used dynamically and potentially reflectively, and that they are likely to be subject to constant change over time. Lipsky (2010), for instance, although using the concept of routine extensively, offered little help in understanding the development of routines over time, the emergence of its ends and the dynamics of peer interactions in it. Our in-depth investigation helped us understand street-level decision-making as jointly developed and available walking routes at the street-level. As collective patterns they have a stabilizing effect; yet simultaneously, each time a routine is performed is an occasion for variation, for retention of that variation and thereby new patterning. Looking at routines allows for an analysis of street-level decision-making as *shared* sets of ever-evolving action patterns, performed in a particular *sequence*, embedded and informed in everyday street-level work with its *spatial*, *temporal*, and *relational* aspects.

Our active employment of RDT with its emphasis on process dimensions of performing organizational tasks, its consecutive detailed analysis of action sequences, and the resulting potential explanations for why routines develop offers an additional contribution to our understanding of street-level innovation, creativity, or improvisation (Lavee and Cohen 2019; Masood and Nisar 2022). Contextual factors and the prioritization of particular ends might shape how practitioners innovate and repair policy.

Finally, this study contributes to both street-level deliberation studies and street-level management studies by demonstrating the potential of organizing and promoting deliberation top-down. Embracing certain goals, promoting guidelines and flowcharts, and setting up an organizational infrastructure through the creation of dedicated, multidisciplinary teams and meetings for deliberation all contribute to promoting deliberation as a central part of practitioners' everyday routine.

To encourage this, street-level managers and local policymakers should pay attention to the context in which

deliberation is to be performed, taking into account the mundane aspects of time, space, and relationships. They should acquire a keen understanding of the everyday routines of their street-level practitioners and the ends that their practitioners have in view when they perform their actions. We can apply these insights to theories of street-level management more generally, which have emphasized the need for management-by-enabling (Brodkin 2008; Sandfort 2000). Recent research indicates that decision-making processes can be structured through professionalization, peer review, and collective decision-making procedures (Rutz and de Bont 2020). Even more recently it has been argued that the development of routines could be a management tool (Goldman and Foldy 2015; Møller 2021). Our insights show the possibilities and complexities of structuring street-level decision-making processes through routine design and highlight the importance of paying attention to the situated and sequenced nature of street-level actions.

We would also like to point to the need for regular dialogue as a vital element of management-by-enabling. Increased discretionary room and an emphasis on deliberation depend on local policymakers, street-level managers, street-level practitioners, and governed publics to frequently interact to demarcate the playing field and help to make routines run smoothly. This can be facilitated by organizing a periodic dialogue in which relevant actors diagnostically reflect, monitor, and adjust the elements that structure street-level work. By doing so, systemic problems in street-level work can be detected early and change can be initiated in local policy procedures, organizational structures, routines, and accountability requirements. In turn, scholars of street-level decision-making need to pay more attention to the interactions between street-level practitioners on the one hand and local policymakers and street-level managers on the other to better grasp and develop theories of management-by-enabling that allow for street-level creativity and improvisation in their everyday deliberation.

Situated performances of and changes to a deliberative routine have consequences for the actual shape of policies. We know from the literature that deliberation helps to diminish experienced uncertainty and provides emotional support (e.g., Raaphorst 2018), filters idiosyncratic judgments that are embedded in assumptions, and moral dispositions (e.g., Zacka 2017), and has the potential to fuel the development of customized and responsive solutions (e.g., Rutz et al. 2017). Applying these existing insights to our analysis makes us wary that the choice for a certain route might enhance but can also inhibit the positive effects of deliberation. Deviations in the performance of deliberative routines could lead to feeling social pressures (Raaphorst and Loyens 2020), to falling back on existing repertoires and relationships (Goldman and Foldy 2015), or to excluding relevant perspectives due to professional turf wars, ignorance, conformity, and groupthink (Møller 2021). Specifically, the exclusion of racial, gender, class, or ethnic perspectives might create serious risks for the equal treatment of already vulnerable citizens (e.g., Watkins-Hayes 2011). In addition, the choice for informal deliberative routes obfuscates how decisions have come about, who has been involved, and whether a thorough discussion has been part of the decision-making process. And lastly, the deliberative processes and the necessary work to maintain them comes with emotional work of its own, possibly creating new uncertainties for practitioners (Raaphorst 2018). To understand how practitioners deal with emotions and social pressures, relationships with peers are important to further look into. It is well possible that the long-term development of relationships and (shared) identities among peers and between peers and managers plays a role in the patterning of routines over time, but our data do not allow us to confirm or deny this.

The risks and high probability of practitioners deviating from routine design for deliberation raises questions regarding the extent to which we can or should trust practitioners to organize their own work and make customized decisions. Discretion has important responsive potential, while inhibiting discretion has proven complex and has often had perverse effects of hidden, invisible street-level practices and outcomes (Brodkin 2008; Sandfort 2000; Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011). Our analysis of the intentionality of routine performance shows that predefined goals cannot simply be imposed to orient practitioners' actions. Therefore, we do not argue for less discretionary room to prevent the risks of routine change that we mentioned above so as to achieve more equal, more purposeful, or more accountable street-level actions. Rather, we believe that practitioners' discretionary room should be structured and managed to prevent its own perverse effects. Creative, collective discretion both in customized decisions and in the organization and repair of work processes requires managers to devote ongoing attention to it, and to engage in a constructive dialogue with their street-level colleagues.

Furthermore, granting discretionary space is not without obligations and we should look into ways to realize better registration and documentation practices by practitioners, whether they enjoy much discretionary room or not. In bringing about better registration and documentation practices, we need to take into account not only the purpose of procedural accountability, but also look into how it aligns with and can contribute to practitioners' intentions. Effective registration has the potential to simplify practitioners' work when it serves as a mnemonic device or even to make practitioners' work meaningful, for instance when it prevents clients from having to tell their story to many different care providers. The further structuring of practitioners' routine change, forms of creative discretion, and registration practices requires additional research.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This ethnographic case study of child and family services in the Netherlands has allowed us to observe the situated performance of deliberation in everyday work. Through participant observation over an extended period of time, combined with interviews and document analysis, we mapped patterns and variations, purposes and ambiguities of how a deliberative routine was brought into being and changed. This study and its design, however, have a number of limitations. We observed 92 performances of routines, allowing comparison between them, but all these performances occurred within one organization, within a specific type of street-level work, and within specific local and national contexts. Our findings can therefore be insightful for other cases, but their transferability depends on similarities and differences within other research settings (Lincoln and Guba 1985).

Child and family services in the Netherlands are in the midst of an important transformation, having been decentralized recently. Pursuing customized services, deliberation became a central element of street-level decision-making, for which

child and family services in the Netherlands provided a well-suited case to explore the situated performance of deliberative routines. The practitioners' professional background made them familiar with peer review and casuistry, possibly spurring their embracing of deliberation. Local characteristics such as the relative independence of and minimum overview by managers and the relinquishing of many of the standardized procedures have contributed to quite large degree of freedom to deviate from the initial routine design and develop new patterns, for which we expect this to be a relatively atypical case.

Yet, as cooperation with a variety of peers across organizations and sectors and the customization of public services seem to increase across contexts, and as deliberation among street-level practitioners is ubiquitous, we believe our findings do have relevance well beyond our case. The question remains, then, how exactly deliberative routines are performed and developed in other settings. We therefore encourage additional, comparative research in other local settings, other domains, and other countries to expand our knowledge of the processes comprising deliberative routine performance and development.

Although it might take different shapes, we expect that in other settings the situated performance of deliberative routines is in big part shaped by contextual factors and particular ends-in-view, possibly leading to new patterns and opening the possibility for reflection. The depiction of the process of situated performance and development of deliberative routines that we have described could therefore serve as an analytical tool to further explore deliberation in different street-level contexts. Specifically, we believe further research is needed that examines how to structure and manage street-level deliberation specifically when there is a relatively large amount of discretionary room (Rutz and de Bont 2020). Relatedly, future research should scrutinize the interactions between street-level practitioners, managers, and policymakers and thoroughly analyze managerial attempts to facilitate change at the street level (Gassner and Gofen 2018). Additionally, a more systematic understanding of practitioners' reflections could be developed and how that spurs both street-level decision-making and the development of deliberative routines (Dittrich, Guérard, and Seidl 2016). Finally, research is needed to understand the emotional work that street-level practitioners enact in order to maintain their internal deliberative processes to provide customized services (Raaphorst 2018). We conclude with the hope that, by offering an empirically grounded process depiction of situated performance and development of deliberative routines and by raising awareness of its consequences and risks, this study provides a basis to further explore these issues for both research and practice.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary data are available at the *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* online.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Data Availability

Because of the sensitive nature of the work observed, confidentiality promised to research participants, and the very limited possibility to anonymize our ethnographic data, data cannot be shared beyond what appears in the manuscript and its appendices. The online appendices include notes on positionality, an overview of research participants, interview guides, an overview of the analytical process, data coding examples, and a detailed case description.

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