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Omgang met regels

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Summary

This dissertation provides an analysis of the way people interact with rules, with a specific focus on the psychological aspects of this interaction. We argue that people often call for rules if they want to safeguard all kinds of interests, but at the same time they also often complain about rules. All these complaints come together in the concept of regulatory burden⁵⁹⁹. Regulatory burden causes great damage to the economy, fuels distrust of the government, and contributes to social unrest. Since the 1980s, reducing regulatory burden has been one of the spearheads of government policy. However, this policy is dominated by an economic perspective that mainly concerns an instrumental approach to the regulatory burden. Regulatory burden is seen as the negative result of a cost-benefit analysis of rules. Yet, this perspective cannot sufficiently explain the experience of regulatory pressure and is therefore increasingly criticized. As a result, interest in the way in which people experience regulatory pressure is increasing.

We assume that the way people experience regulatory pressure can teach us quite substantially about how they deal with rules. To investigate this regulatory burden experience, we shift the economic perspective to a psychological perspective. Based on two important theories, Epstein's Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory (CEST)⁶⁰⁰ and a theory by Cropanzano⁶⁰¹, we design a psychological architecture of regulatory burden. We then validate this theoretical construct with four studies.

Psychological architecture of regulatory pressure

We construct a psychological architecture of regulatory pressure based on the two theories mentioned above.

(1) Epstein's theory (CEST) states that information is processed by our brain through two different, but still closely working together systems, viz. an experiential system and a rational system. However, people appear to have a preference for one of the two systems. They therefore seem to rely on one of the two systems. This preference is measurable (with the Rational-

⁵⁹⁹ The term regulatory pressure is also used

⁶⁰⁰ Epstein 1990, 1994, 2003; Pacini & Epstein 1999.

⁶⁰¹ Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey & Toth 1997; Cropanzano & Ambrose 2001; Cropanzano et al. 2011.

Experiential Inventory (REI-40)⁶⁰²) and leads to variations in the way people interpret and respond to phenomena. We deduce from this observation that the preference observed will also apply to the way in which the persons involved deal with rules.

(2) Cropanzano's theory offers insights into justice motives, which can be divided into instrumental and social-emotional motives. We therefore investigate whether these motives also encourage people to experience regulatory pressure. If so, then there is a connection between feelings of justice and perception of regulatory burden.

We suspect that people, depending on their preference for information processing, create different representations of reality and experience and express regulatory pressure differently. They also have different motives for experiencing regulatory pressure. Extensive research based on the CEST has provided insight into the different characteristics of both systems. Based on these characteristics and Cropanzano's description of motives, it can be expected that people with different preferences will experience a regulatory burden as follows.

Experiential people will approach regulatory pressure more preconsciously, intuitively and emotionally. They are more likely to express themselves in stories that appeal to the experience and perception of regulatory pressure. Their experience of regulatory pressure is more preconscious and passive. They experience regulatory pressure more from social-emotional motives. It means that they attach importance to their bond with an authority of the group by which they feel connected and with their position within this group. Trust and having a voice are important here.

Rational people will approach regulatory pressure analytically, logically and reality-oriented and express themselves in argumentative reasoning in which they try to provide an objective picture of reality. They experience regulatory pressure more consciously and more actively from instrumental motives. This means that they weigh the advantages and disadvantages of rules against each other (cost-benefit analysis) and experience regulatory pressure if the disadvantages outweigh the advantages.

Definition of regulatory pressure

The various disciplines assume that behavior can be guided by rules. However, people do not always like it when their behavior is disrupted, and certainly not when it harms their interests.

⁶⁰² Epstein et al. 1998; Pacini & Epstein 1999; De REI-40 is beschikbaar op: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319444554_Rational-Experiential_Inventory-40_REI-40 (geraadpleegd op 12 juni 2020).

They then experience resistance to the intervention. Cropanzano's theory shows that if people's instrumental or social-emotional interests are harmed, they experience this intervention as unjust. We suspect (based on the CEST) that regulatory pressure is also motivated by these two interests.

We therefore define regulatory pressure as follows:

Regulatory pressure is the resistance that is unnecessarily evoked by a behavioral intervention that threatens instrumental and social-emotional interests.

Problem definition

Our problem definition is: *what effect does a preference for information processing have on dealing with rules?*

Research methods and research questions

We have partitioned the problem statement into six research questions, which we have answered using four different research methods.

(1) Our first study is a Trend Survey. Based on the CEST, we suspect that there is an experiential discourse on regulatory burden in the literature, but this discourse has so far gone unnoticed. Our first research question (RQ1) is therefore: *can an experiential regulatory pressure discourse be distinguished alongside a rational regulatory pressure discourse in the literature?*" Google Books' Ngram Viewer (NGV) allowed us to examine the relative use of words that represent regulatory pressure, in American literature, by year, during the period between 1919 and 2019. We have selected these regulatory burden words based on the (American) regulatory burden literature. We took into account a distinction between emotional and non-emotional regulatory pressure words, because emotion is an important distinction between the characteristics of rational and experiential processing. With an exploratory component analysis, we investigated whether these regulatory pressure words are related in terms of dimensions over the past 100 years.

(2) With a second study, a survey (Survey -1) (N = 129) we continue the research into the psychological architecture of regulatory burden and try to determine (a) what motives do people have for experiencing a regulatory burden? And (b) what consequences does experiencing regulatory pressure have for the willingness to comply? (a) Regarding motives, we suspect, based on the CEST and Cropanzano's theory, that if rules violate instrumental and/or

socio-emotional interests, these interventions are judged as unjust and perceived as a regulatory burden. To further investigate this suspicion, we formulated RQ2 as follows: *What effect does violating instrumental and/or social-emotional interests through interventions have on the perception of regulatory burden?*

(b) Regarding consequences, justice researchers have established two things: (1) that the experience of (in)justice influences the willingness to obey and (2) that emotions can mediate this effect (triangular relationship between (a) information about injustice, (b) perception of regulatory burden and (c) willingness to comply). Based on these results, we want to investigate whether the perception of regulatory pressure has the same mediating effect.

We therefore formulate RQ3 as follows. *What effect does the experience of regulatory pressure have on the willingness to comply?* We asked 129 students from The Hague University of Applied Sciences to each rate four rules based on their personal experiences in education. The questions manipulated the information about whether or not both social-emotional and instrumental interests were violated. We then tested whether the students experienced regulatory pressure under these circumstances and were willing to adhere to the rules.

(3) With a third study, an experiment (N = 342), we answer research questions 4 and 5. We focused on the same triangular relationship as described in our second study, but this time we investigated the way in which processing preference influences decision-making around the triangular relationship. The fourth and fifth research questions are therefore as follows.

(RQ4) *What role does processing preference play in the effect that violating instrumental and/or social-emotional interests through interventions has on the experience of regulatory pressure, and*

(RQ5) *What role does processing preference play in the effect that regulatory pressure has on willingness to comply?*

We conducted an experiment in which 342 students from The Hague University of Applied Sciences participated. The experiment was intended to also confirm the conclusions of the previous study (RQ2 and RQ3). This processing preference was measured with the Rational-Experiential Inventory (REI-40).

(4) To gain a more complete picture of the psychological architecture of regulatory burden, we shifted the focus with our fourth study (Survey-2) (N = 119). In previous studies

we always assumed a situation in which people experience regulatory pressure as a result of an unjust intervention (rule). In this latest study, we want to know how participants intervene justly in the situations of others. Because justice is often examined in distributional issues, we formulated the sixth research question (RQ6) as follows. *What effect does processing preference have on the motives for making a fair distribution?*

We asked our respondents to formulate a fair solution to a distribution issue and to submit it in writing. They had the freedom to explain their thought process and considerations. This gave us a wealth of textual data for us to analyze. For analyzing the text, we used Pennebaker's *Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count* (LIWC)⁶⁰³ method, which links psychological categories to word clusters. The use of different word clusters provided insight into the patterns of how people approached and solved the problem. In addition, we administered the Rational-Experiential Inventory (REI) to our respondents, which allowed us to link their information processing preferences to their use of certain categories of words, as Pennebaker describes them.

Results of our research

In response to RQ1, the trend research showed two distinctive dimensions of regulatory burden words that we could identify as a rational and an experiential (emotional) regulatory burden discourse. The discourses seem to parallel our chosen major theoretical approaches: CEST and Cropanzano's theory. It means that (1) we may distinguish the discourses into a rational and an experiential discourse and that (2) the rational discourse can be associated with instrumental interests (deregulation) and the experiential discourse with social-emotional interests (voice and trust). Also interesting is that both discourses take place in a broad cultural and political context (from Google Books).

Following RQ2, both the survey research (Survey-1) and the experimental research showed that instrumental and social-emotional information about rules had a significant effect on the perception of regulatory burden. In response to RQ4, the experiment showed that this was true for both experiential and rational people. Both motives formulated by Cropanzano therefore had a significant effect on the perception of regulatory burden. This result

⁶⁰³ Pennebaker, Francis & Booth 2001; Pennebaker, Booth & Francis 2007; Pennebaker, Booth, Boyd & Francis 2015.

confirms our suspicion that instrumental and social-emotional motives influence the sense of justice, as well as the perception of regulatory burden.

The analyses of Survey 1 and the experiment also show that there is a strong negative relationship between experiencing regulatory pressure and the willingness to comply. The answer to RQ3 and RQ5 is that (1) if people experience regulatory pressure, they are less willing to follow the rule (and vice versa) and that (2) this applies to both people with an experiential preference and people with a rational preference. However, both studies suggest that people with different processing preferences follow different routes through which a decision to comply is made: Rational people take a direct route between regulatory burden information (violation of instrumental and socio-emotional interests) and willingness to comply, which runs independently of the perception of regulatory burden and experiential people use an indirect route between regulatory burden information and willingness to comply. This indirect route runs via the perception of regulatory pressure, which mediates the effect that regulatory pressure information generally has on willingness to comply. All this means that if the government treats people with respect and trust, the generally beneficial effects of such treatment, especially for experiential people, can be offset by past experiences.

With our second survey study (Survey-2), we answered RQ6. The analysis showed that people with an experiential preference use insight words and social words significantly more often, from which we could infer that they intuitively (and probably unconsciously) communicated their moral beliefs in their formulations. Intuitively, they are guided by the moral norms that apply within the group with which they feel connected. This suggests that they mainly have social-emotional interests in moral decisions and communicate about them. In contrast, people with a rational preference used distant, complex words significantly more often and showed a higher use of certainty words, which may indicate a lower need for immediate decision-making (need for closure). This suggests that they are taking the time to analyze and consider the problem. They seem to have mainly instrumental interests.

The problem statement of our dissertation was: what effect does a preference for information processing (based on CEST) have on dealing with rules? The results of the studies showed that people with different information processing preferences have different motives for complaining about rules, use different discourses about their complaints and feelings of anxiety about rules, use different vocabularies for this and make decisions in different ways about whether or not to comply with rules. The research largely confirms the theoretically

designed psychological architecture of regulatory pressure. For example, experiential people seem to deal with regulatory pressure more preconsciously, intuitively and emotionally. They experience regulatory pressure more preconsciously and passively. They experience regulatory pressure more from social-emotional motives. It means that they attach importance to (1) their bond with an authority of the group with which they feel connected and to (2) their position within this group. Trust and having a voice are important here. Based on such motives, they assess incoming information, for example about the unfairness of rules or about the experience of regulatory pressure.

Rational people approach regulatory pressure more distantly, analytically and logically. They experience regulatory pressure more consciously and more actively from instrumental motives. This means that they weigh the advantages and disadvantages of rules against each other (cost-benefit analysis) and experience regulatory pressure if the disadvantages outweigh the advantages. They assess the incoming information calculatedly and take the time to weigh things up against each other.

Consequences

The research concludes that both the rational and the experiential approach are important when dealing with rules and that these approaches can have different effects on compliance with rules. This supports the idea that the government should not only act rationally when developing policy and regulations, but should also anticipate the realization that people also deal with rules more intuitively and emotionally. Emotions must be understood and acknowledged, not ignored or thwarted. Regulatory burden policy is therefore not only about the use of cost-benefit analyses and weighing assessment frameworks, but also about actually understanding the social-emotional interests involved. Regulations must be tailored to both rational considerations and the intuitive moral interests of the people affected by the rules. This is not about which processing style offers the best solutions. We have good reason to believe that the interaction between the two styles should play a major role in regulations.