

Policy pressure

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Stress as a universal phenomenon

- *An individual problem* (e.g. 1/3 of Dutch civil servants suffer from stress due a too high workload)
- *A collective or institutional problem* on various levels of society
- Leads to feelings of pressure, overload and impotence

Institutional stress

- Citizens suffer from *regulatory pressure* (due to an overload of rules and regulation by governments)
- Governments suffer from *administrative pressure* (due to a focus on internal processes and procedures)
- Civil servants suffer from *policy pressure* (due to mechanisms imbedded in the process of policy making)

Dealing with regulatory pressure

- Cut the deadwood out (get rid of redundant rules)
- Increase service levels to alleviate the pain
- Let others do the dirty work (decentralization, self-regulation)

How to measure success?

Policy pressure

- Related to the process of policy making
- External sources (society, politics, international partners, other levels of government)
- Internal sources (operational processes)

Benchmark policy pressure

- Conducted by Ministry of the Interior
- Measured policy pressure at 36 directorate-generals from 12 departments
- Covering 8.513 fte
- Asked NSOB to identify factors triggering policy pressure

Triggers of policy pressure

1. Politics
2. Cooperation
3. Media
4. Regulation
5. Withinputs

Trigger 1: Politics

- Pressure due to dreams, ambitions and promises of politicians
- Civil servants have to translate them into efficient, legitimate and accurate policies
- But: the road to hell is paved with good intentions (detrimental effects of new policies have to be dealt with by even more rules)
- Effect: policy avalanche

Evidence from benchmark

- Intensive consultations with politicians during period studied: 9.284 external consultations and working visits, 1.290 international working visits and 8.069 internal consultations
- Benchmark only shows snowball that starts the avalanche but not how it unfolds

Trigger 2: Cooperation

- Pressure that results from collaboration with other levels of government
- Administration is no neutral, apolitical process, but an arena in which politicking and negotiation take place
- 'Court politics' (Allison)
- 'Organization is bias' (Wildavsky)
- Effect: institutional interference

Evidence from benchmark

- On the national level an est. 970 fte only dealt with internal consultation in the period studied
- 5.970 enterprises and institutions had to be dealt with
- 2.079 interest groups had to be dealt with collectively and 1.130 individually
- 2.324 other governmental institutions had to be dealt with collectively and 648 individually
- 388 quangos had to be dealt with as principal and 1.357 in other capacities

Trigger 3: Media

- Pressure due to media coverage and attention, as media forces politicians into action
- A symbiosis of politics and media? (Lloyd)
- 'Drama democracy' (Elchardus)
- Politicians and civil servants as extras in a story controlled by the media (Van Twist)
- Media power & media politics
- Effect: incidence resonance as policy-making becomes dominated by the media

Evidence from benchmark

- Media coverage led to a sharp rise in parliamentary questions in the last 28 years
- 3.404 parliamentary questions had to be dealt with during the period studied by all departments, as well as 2.237 letters from commissions and 818 motions.
- Parliament made 3.029 commitments and held 2.024 debates.
- Benchmark only deals with the influence of the media via politics but does not take its direct influence into account on civil servants.

Trigger 4: Regulation

- Pressure due to the need for accountability
- ‘Rise of the regulatory state’
- ‘Audit society’ (Powell)
- ‘Inquisitive democracy’ (‘t Hart)
- Effect: accountability stress, covering for one’s actions becomes important

Evidence from benchmark

- On the national government level 862 fte only deal with internal management and accountability
- 405 reports by regulatory agencies in the period studied, 1.740 consultations, 1.113 consultations on demand, 1.050 formal reactions and 55 commissions

Trigger 5: Withinputs

- Pressure from within
- Parkinson's Law: 'Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion.'
- 'Budget maximizing behaviour by civil servants' (Niskanen)
- 'Bureaucratic dysfunctionality' (Crozier)
- 'Policy as its own cause' (Wildavsky)
- Effect: organizational autism

Evidence from benchmark

- One directorate-general needs on average 73 others to realize its policies
- Directorate-generals participate on average in 14 of the in total 178 lobby groups
- 8.069 internal consultations during period studies
- 363.080 reports were written during period studied, which on average had to be dealt with by 7 individual civil servants

Policy pressure as a whirlpool

