

Resisting or Facilitating Change? How Street-Level Managers' *Situational Work* Contributes to the Implementation of Public Reforms

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Abstract

Managers of street-level organizations play an important role in the successful implementation of public reforms. A prevailing view within the public administration literature is that this work involves the adaptation between reforms and local contexts, where divergence is viewed as a form of resistance to change. The article challenges this prevalent reform-centric view by introducing a situation-centric perspective and coining the concept of *situational work* as a significant form of managerial work during implementation. Situational work encompasses managerial actions that ensure functional and well-ordered service delivery in local street-level organizations by accommodating everyday situational contingencies, including reform objectives, but also the interests and expectations of workers, clients, and local service partners. The concept of situational work, then, broadens the recognized scope of managerial activities that contribute to successful reform implementation, reconceptualizing divergence from reform design as constructive rather than as resistance to change. The article draws on an extensive multi-wave study of a major organizational reform in Norway, based on observations of meetings as well as qualitative interviews of managers, union representatives, frontline workers, and collaborating partners in six welfare service offices at three points in time (altogether 23 observation sessions and 173 interviews).

Introduction

Successful implementation of public reform is a key challenge for politicians and policy makers, not least because of local contingencies at the point of implementation that include conflicts between the reforms and professionals' cognitive schemata, interests, norms, and values (Brodkin 2011; Hill 2014; Hill and Hupe 2014; Lipsky 1980, 2010; Lozeau et al. 2002; Pressman and Wildavsky 1973). Emerging theory highlights the crucial role of managers in minimizing such conflicts and supporting implementation (Breit et al. 2018; Cloutier et al. 2016; Gassner and Gofen 2018; Hupe and Buffat 2014; Lynn et al. 2000; Meier 2009; Robichau and Lynn 2009; Winter 2012). In particular, middle managers have been identified as key facilitators of meaningful change—for example, by making sense of reforms for frontline workers and others (Balogun 2006; Balogun and Johnson 2004, 2005; Brodkin 2011; Bryant and Stensaker, 2011; Hope 2010; May and Winter 2009; Riccucci et al. 2004; Rouleau and Balogun 2011; Teulier and Rouleau 2013); translating reforms into practice (Gassner and Gofen 2018; Radelli and Sitton-Kent 2016; Røvik 2016); or reconfiguring the institutional order at street level in line with

the reform template (Breit et al. 2018; Cloutier et al. 2016; Perner and Skjølvik 2018).

While this middle-manager perspective on implementation is undoubtedly relevant, it tends to advance a reform-centric view, focusing predominantly on actions related directly to the reform as such. Consequently, implementation studies have tended to underplay the significance of the subtle complexity of the everyday work of managers of *street level organizations* that ensure the effective delivery of local public services, such as schools, police services, or social welfare units, during such disruptions (Gassner and Gofen 2018). Unlike supervisors who monitor and facilitate frontline workers' task performance (Bakkeli 2022; Keulemans and Groeneveld 2020) or upper-tier middle managers who develop and implement strategic policy (Høiland and Klemsdal 2020), *street-level managers* are responsible for ensuring that services meet the needs and expectations of diverse stakeholders, who include workers, clients, and local service partners as well as politicians and upper-tier managers (Gassner and Gofen 2018).

Thus, despite their key role in maintaining viable local services during reform implementation, the role of street-level managers remains undertheorized (Gassner and Gofen 2018). The present article addresses this knowledge gap by introducing the concept of *situational work*, which emphasizes the everyday here-and-now managerial actions that ensure the ongoing viability of frontline service delivery. The proposed concept of situational work builds on the phenomenological and pragmatist concept of *social situations*,

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referring to complex social contexts as continuously enacted into integrated wholes (gestalts) by the actors involved (e.g., Dewey 1938/2013). Situational work conceptualizes street-level managers' divergence from reform objectives not as resistance but as the pragmatic effort to maintain service performance while accommodating and integrating a complexity of diverse contingencies through a combination of practical modifications and discursive articulations.

To demonstrate the significance of situational work, we draw on a longitudinal qualitative study of a major organizational reform in Norway's public welfare services (the NAV reform, 2006–11). We focus on the shift from reform planning to reform implementation as reflected in everyday practice in six selected street-level organizations.

The article contributes to theory in several ways. Conceptually, we augment existing theoretical understandings of organizational reform and policy implementation by coining the concept of situational work. This concept draws a more nuanced distinction between on the one hand, activities previously associated with implementation gaps and resistance (i.e., decoupling and symbolic compliance) (Hirsch and Bermiss 2009; Lozeau et al. 2002; Pache and Santos 2013) or rejection of reform objectives (Christensen and Læg Reid 2007), and on the other, more constructive and enabling responses to reforms. Empirically, we extend the emerging and under-theorized literature on street-level management (Gassner and Gofen 2018). We do so by highlighting their paradoxical role as subtle enablers of reform implementation as they handle a variety of situational contingencies (in addition to the reforms themselves) to sustain viable working orders ensuring service delivery during public reforms. By these contributions, we introduce a situation-centric view which challenges the prevailing reform-centric view on implementation in the public administration and management literature.

Implementation of Organizational Reform

Following Pressman and Wildavsky's (1973) seminal work, the issue of reform implementation as "anything meant to happen after an intention or aspiration has been expressed" (Hupe 2014, p. 166) has emerged as a key topic in the public administration literature. Dominated by normative perspectives, studies of public reform and policy implementation have emphasized the importance of aligning policy and implementation (Hupe 2014; Morales et al. 2015), and any disparities between policy-on-paper and policy-in-practice are seen as failures of implementation or policy slippage (Moore 1987). This approach reflects the prevailing view that public organizations' responses to institutional expectations include decoupling, symbolic compliance, or even outright rejection (Christensen and Læg Reid 2007; Hirsch and Bermiss 2009; Lozeau et al. 2002).

At the same time, it is well established in the literature that to understand the mechanisms that underpin successful reform implementation, it is important to capture the everyday activities of frontline workers at lower organizational levels (Cloutier et al. 2016; Lowndes and Wilson 2003; van der Voet et al. 2014). From this bottom-up perspective, there is increasing evidence that such activities cannot be reduced to either compliance or subversion (Hupe 2014; Brodtkin 2011; Klemsdal and Wittusen 2021); rather, they reflect how reforms disrupt institutionalized practices, rules, and norms in

public service organizations (Hill and Hupe 2014; Lozeau et al. 2002). An increasing number of studies have reported that professionals at the street level may deploy a range of strategies to influence the content or outcome of reform (Currie et al. 2012; Lefsrud and Meyer 2012; Lipsky 2010; McGivern et al. 2015; Perner and Skjølvik 2018; Tummers et al. 2015).

In this context, there is growing interest in the role of street-level managers in reform implementation (Gassner and Gofen 2018; Lynn et al. 2000). As middle managers, they find themselves sandwiched (Gjerde and Alvesson 2020) between policy makers at the strategic level and the frontline operators who must execute those policies and strategies (Balogun and Johnson 2004, 2005; Floyd and Wooldridge 1994; Keulemans and Groeneveld 2020; Radaelli and Sitton-Kent 2016; Teulier and Rouleau 2013). Street-level managers must also operate in the space between different interests and stakeholders—for example, between administrators and professionals (Gatenby et al. 2015; Høiland and Klemsdal 2020); between competing institutional logics (Fossestøl et al. 2015) or between different approaches to services such as state-agency and citizen-agency (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2000) as well as professions-agency (Cecchini and Harrits 2022). According to Gassner and Gofen (2018), an important role of street-level managers is to maintain frontline organizational activities in line with the demands of policy makers, street-level bureaucrats, frontline supervisors, and clients. Street-level managers are responsible for "the design, execution, and assessment of street-level delivery arrangements, and held accountable for its outputs and outcomes" (Gassner and Gofen 2018, 555).

Existing studies typically assume that the work of street-level managers during implementation is to adapt reform objectives and local contingencies. This implies a direct reaction to ongoing signals and an effort to accommodate reform objectives by influencing frontline workers' understanding of policy goals (Brodtkin 2011; May and Winter 2009; Ricucci et al. 2004), for example, through sensemaking, sensegiving, or translation of those objectives into terms that workers will understand (Balogun 2006; Bryant and Stensaker 2011; Hope 2010; Teulier and Rouleau 2013; Radaelli and Sitton-Kent 2016; Rouleau and Balogun 2011), as well as by motivating the workers and shaping their attitudes (Keulemans and Groeneveld 2020). Invoking the concept of "institutional work" as the purposive effort to create, change, or maintain institutional order (Lawrence et al. 2013), recent studies have also positioned street-level managers as active agents of reform implementation rather than as mere mediators. For example, in their study of institutional work among hospital managers during organizational reform in the Canadian public health sector, Cloutier et al. (2016) identified four forms of institutional work—structural, conceptual, operational, and relational—in managers' efforts to change hospitals' institutional order in line with reform goals. Similarly, in their study of new legislation governing the public procurement of consulting services in Sweden, Perner and Skjølvik (2018) characterized the institutional work of middle managers (and street-level workers) as adaptation to reform through "mobilization" and "cultivation."

The present article is motivated by a concern that existing studies of organizational reform and policy implementation have adopted too narrow a view of the relationship between reform objectives (including policy formulation, instructions, and guidelines) and the implementation-related activities of

street-level managers. For that reason, there is a risk that street-level managers' actions to maintain daily service performance are ignored or misinterpreted as incongruent with the demands of reform. In the next section, we reformulate existing conceptions of street-level managers' actions in this context by highlighting their concern with *situations* rather than reforms and by introducing the concept of *situational work* to capture their handling of those situations as integrated and orderly wholes. This shift of perspective locates reform objectives as one of several concerns that street-level managers must address to ensure the viability of service delivery during implementation of reforms.

Defining Situational Work

Coining a situation-centric approach to implementation studies, and situational work as a central managerial activity ensuring successful implementation, we draw on pragmatist philosophy and in particular John Dewey (1938/2013). Pragmatism is characterized by a commitment to perceiving the phenomena of the world emerging in continuous open-ended processes, and a view of actors as playing a central role in this process by simultaneously adapting to and modifying their living environments (Simpson and den Hond 2022). Central to this approach is to conceive *situations* as the site where these processes unfold. Dewey (1938/2013) defines situations as “holistic contexts of actions where the actors never experience or relate to isolated singular objects or events, but where an object or event is always experienced in their relationship to, as an aspect or phase of, an environing experienced world—a situation” (p. 112). According to Dewey, situations may be experienced as initially “indeterminate” because of the presence of multiple and sometimes obscure, confusing or conflicting “existential constituents” (p. 170–3). In everyday life, he says, in order to be actionable an indeterminate situation must be transformed “into one that is so determinate in its constitutive distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole” (p. 167). This transformation entails two key aspects that can only be separated analytically: On the one hand there is a practical aspect involving “operational experimental modifications” of the obscure or conflicting existential constituents of the situation (p. 170, 187). On the other hand, there is a discursive aspect where experiences and perceptions from operational modifications of the indeterminate situation are articulated in “symbols, defining terms and propositions [...] in order to retain and carry forward [...] existential subject matters” (p. 186) as a new determinate order of the situation. This highlights how situations are not merely constituted by contextual contingencies (or “constituents” in Dewey's terms) but are always also a product of the participants' enactment. In this way, pragmatism and Dewey offer both an analytic approach to the study of social phenomena sensitizing us to the messy complexity of peoples everyday living situations, and a notion of agency as primarily oriented toward improving whole situations rather than enacting preconceived ideas or entities.

On this conceptual background, we define situational work as the purposeful efforts of street-level managers to transform indeterminate work situations into unified determinate wholes within the organizational context. Situational work involves what we characterize as *practical modifications* and

discursive articulations, in which street-level managers seek to create shared viable local working orders—in other words, determinate situations in which frontline workers can cooperate efficiently to perform the street level organization's services.

The indeterminate situations that prompt situational work are constituted by obscure, confusing or conflicting *contingencies*, in our terms. For example, a typical feature of organizational reforms is that they represent confusing or obscure objectives constituting “exogenous jolts” that clash with established ways of working (Currie et al. 2012; Lefsrud and Meyer 2012; McGivern et al. 2015), thereby representing conflicting contingencies in situational terms. Other conflicting contingencies include individual competency deficits, increased staff turnover or sick leave, and divergence between professional groups or subcultures. Contingencies involving external stakeholders may include revised instructions from upper levels of the public sector hierarchy or the conflicting expectations and demands of clients or service partners.

Theoretically we might assume that the extent of situational work varies according to the level of clarity of and compatibility between the prevailing contingencies. Greater complexity increases the need for situational work to sustain a viable local order, as for example, when multiple contingencies create new boundary conditions, major restructuring, and internal disruption. In short, the more reform and its consequences disrupt the established working order, the greater the need for managers to engage in situational work.

Practical modifications address the consequences and inconsistencies of contingencies that constitute indeterminate frontline work situations, aiming to modify them into a unified orderly whole. For instance, it may be necessary to practically handle conflicts related to professional identity, individual capabilities, sudden increases in sick leave or staff turnover, or the expectations of clients, partners, or policy makers. Practical modifications might include planned managerial decisions regarding organizational design or other integration mechanisms to accommodate constellations of emerging contingencies. In addition, they may also include informal improvisation or otherwise altered practices as workers attempt to reconfigure their interactions to meet the demands of clients or collaborating partners, *in situ*.

Following practical modifications, *discursive articulation* is needed to establish a shared conception of the new working order, facilitating ongoing cooperation on service delivery at the frontline. To that end, managers must talk about the new order in the context of internal development work, that is, give expressions of and formulate the new working order so that the actors involved can recognize it and adapt their actions accordingly (cf. Strauss 1988). Articulations of new working orders span from official reformulations of organization design to more loosely retrospective characterizations of emerging working orders. This serves the function of enhancing shared awareness of and attention to new ways of working and provides a discursive basis for sustaining and developing service performance for further learning. Articulation often involves justifications of these practical modifications as a coherent and reasonable new working order that balances a range of stakeholder concerns, including concerns regarding reform implementation.

The core building blocks of situational work are shown in figure 1.

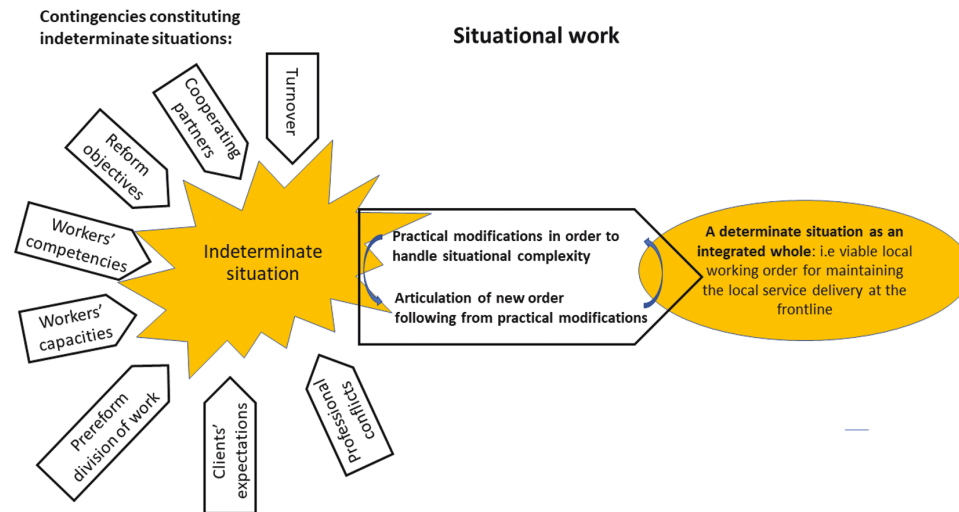


Figure 1. Situational Work as the Dynamic between Practical Modifications and Articulation of a New Working Order in Rendering Indeterminate Work Situations Determinate.

While a reform-centric implementation perspective may acknowledge the inevitability of local contextual adaptation, there is a tendency to focus on the reform as the figure to be enacted in the local context. In contrast, a situation-centric perspective conceives of the situation as a whole as the figure to be enacted and adapted to contextual circumstances—in other words, the reform is just one of the multiple contingencies that shape expectations regarding everyday task performance. From mere agents of implementation who support or resist reform objectives in their everyday work, this shift of perspective reframes street-level managers as situational workers who create and sustain determinate work situations to ensure ongoing service delivery.

Situational Work in Practice

Empirical Study: Implementation of an Administrative Reform

To illustrate situational work in practice, we draw on a large-scale longitudinal study of reform in the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration (NAV), which formed part of an officially commissioned evaluation. In one of Norway's largest ever organizational reforms, the state public employment service and national insurance administration and the municipal local social services were merged to provide more coordinated and effective labor market assistance for marginalized groups (St.prp. 46 2004–2005). In particular, the NAV reform involved the establishment of 456 frontline offices in all Norwegian municipalities between 2006 and 2011, and our data were collected during that process.

As a political requirement, all three services were to be incorporated and physically co-located in these formal street-level organizations. A consultancy firm was hired by the central authorities to make recommendations regarding their design, including organizing principles, resource allocation, and formal work processes. Among other changes, it was proposed to divide the street-level organizations into a reception function (for information and short-term client assistance) and a so-called “follow-up” function (for more concentrated long-term assistance) (Andreassen and Aars 2015). In addition, street-level managers were given autonomy to design

local plans to accommodate location-specific contingencies such as clientele profile and municipality-level political priorities (Fimreite and Lægveid 2009). The design process was collaborative, involving managers and employee representatives from each of the three former services.

To commence implementation of the reforms, staff from the three services were transferred to the new integrated street-level organization and moved to a new office building. For frontline workers and street-level managers alike, the process challenged established norms, beliefs, roles, and competencies, as this more seamless and integrated mode of operation entailed new ways of acting and interacting across existing work boundaries and structures. When the new offices opened, the intention was that managers and frontline workers would together develop a new local organization with integrated practices and a common identity. During the implementation process, situational work activities enabled managers to make the new organizational design work alongside the requirements of everyday service delivery.

Empirical Material

The present article draws on interview and observational data collected from six street-level organizations at three time points over a period of 2 years. Organizations were strategically sampled to capture differences related to geographic location, size, and organizational design. While the goal of all local plans was to provide integrated welfare services, the street-level organizations also differed in their redistribution of tasks, which depended on workers' previous responsibilities and skills. In all six organizations, situational work was a significant feature of managers' activities. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the six case offices and associated data.

To examine the different stages of the implementation process, data were collected in three waves at intervals of about 1 year. Data collection was conducted at field visits that lasted 2–3 d. Each wave included in-depth interviews with managers, union representatives, workers from the three former services, and key external stakeholders, all selected to ensure that all relevant voices were heard. Wherever possible, the same individuals were interviewed on each wave. Interviews lasted between 1 and 2 h. The interviews followed interview guides

Table 1. Description of the Data Material

Office	Year Opened	Time of Fieldwork	Data Collection				
			Data Type	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Total
Office A	2008	Wave 1: November 2008 Wave 2: November 2009 Wave 3: November 2010	SLM	1	1	1	3
			SP	3	3	3	9
			FW	9	1	3	13
			UR	1	2	1	4
			SH		4		4
			Obs.	4	2		6
Office B	2007	Wave 1: November 2007 Wave 2: November 2008 Wave 3: November 2009	SLM	1	1	1	3
			SP				
			FW	6	5	5	16
			UR	1			1
			SH	5	4	5	14
			Obs.	4			4
Office C	2007	Wave 1: June 2007 Wave 2: June 2008 Wave 3: June 2009	SLM	1	1	1	3
			SP	1	3	1	5
			FW	4	1	3	8
			UR	2	2		4
			SH	2		2	4
			Obs.		2		2
Office D	2007	Wave 1: April 2007 Wave 2: April 2008 Wave 3: April 2009	SLM	1	1	1	3
			SP	2	5	3	10
			FW	8	4	4	16
			UR	2			2
			SH			2	2
			Obs.	3			3
Office E	2007	Wave 1: November 2007 Wave 2: November 2008 Wave 3: November 2009	SLM	1	1	1	3
			SP	2	4	2	8
			FW	9	2	7	18
			UR	1	3	2	6
			SH				
			Obs.	1	1	1	3
Office F	2007	Wave 1: December 2007 Wave 2: December 2008 Wave 3: December 2009	SLM	1	1	1	3
			SP	1	3	1	5
			FW	3	12	8	23
			UR	2	1	1	4
			SH		3	4	7
			Obs.	3		2	5
Total				70 interv. 15 obs.	54 interv. 5 obs.	52 interv. 3 obs.	173 interv. 23 obs.

SLM = Office manager; SP=Supervisor (head of department/team); UR = Union Representative; FW = Frontline Worker; SH = Stakeholder (external). External stakeholders include collaborating services, external service providers, and employers in the labor market. Obs = Observation of staff meetings.

to ensure comparative data, and topics included the implementation process, changes in organizational structure, measures, and practices, as well as challenges and how these were managed. Probing elicited further information about changes, consequences, and how and why these changes came about (i.e., formally and/or informally). To reduce retrospective bias, informants were asked to provide as much descriptive detail

as possible, including specific examples for probing purposes. In addition, we read local documents and sat in on team and office meetings to observe how participants talked about how they were doing and what they were supposed to do. Overall, the empirical material revealed changes in how work was organized and how the reasons for the changes were articulated. As the actors performing the situational work, the street-level

managers were an especially important source; to corroborate the managers' views, we also referred directly and indirectly to frontline workers and team leaders.

Informed consent from the informants was obtained by providing written information before each field visit and interview, and all participants and locations have been anonymized. The project has been approved by the Norwegian Data Protection Services.

Data Analysis and Presentation

The abductive analysis of situational work was an iterative process, moving between empirical material and theory in pursuit of further theoretical development. The approach was inspired by Alvenson and Kärreman (2007) and involved the active discovery and resolution of so-called mysteries in the theory development. In the present case, the “mystery” related to the unexpected finding that street-level managers engaged to such a large extent in work that was situation-oriented rather than reform-oriented—that is, work that did not relate directly to reform implementation. In the early stages of analysis, we identified two distinct types of modifications: (a) those involving direct reform implementation and (b) non-reform-related modifications to accommodate emerging contingencies in the stakeholders (frontline workers, clients, cooperating partners) responses to initial implementation, as well as from other non-reform-related sources. This latter category was of particular interest because while managers referred explicitly to these modifications as deviations from the reform template, they also seemed to regard them as important measures for ensuring both successful reform implementation and ongoing service delivery.

The theoretical concept of situational work was built mainly on Dewey's (1938/2013) concepts of *situations* and their transformation from *indeterminate* to *determinate*. Based on this theoretical elaboration, we developed a three-part operationalization of situational work: (a) *contingencies* triggering situational work, leading to (b) *practical modifications* and (c) *articulations* of the order following the modifications. These analytical categories sensitized us to the importance of non-reform contingencies as a source of situational indeterminacy and to the various types of work undertaken by street-level managers in seeking to render local work situations determinate. In general, the data supported our account of the

common characteristics of situational work across street-level organizations as shown in figure 2 and further documented with quotes from the empirical material in Appendix.

The empirical basis for this concept of situational work is demonstrated here in three vignettes. According to Reay et al. (2019), vignettes are an accepted way of presenting insights and findings from qualitative studies, using event- and episode-related narratives to illustrate theoretical concepts: “This approach foregrounds the interconnections among categories and gives space to show the findings in ways that capture more richness in an easily-readable and credible way” (p. 8). As well as capturing the fine-meshed relations between contingencies, practical modifications, and articulation, vignettes contextualize specific events and data excerpts within a larger integrated story. Hence, in using vignettes this way, we sought to capture the rich, micro-level dynamics of situational work.

The selection of three vignettes out of six possible makes it possible to combine empirical richness from each case office and illustrate the diversity of experiences and local contingencies in different offices, at the same time as showing the similar overarching character of situational work in all frontline offices. The downside is that the scope of these findings is necessarily limited. To compensate for this limitation, Appendix provides further illustrations from the remaining case offices. For analytical clarity, we distinguish in the vignettes between quotes illustrating contingencies, practical modifications, and articulations; in practice, all the quotes more or less illuminate all three.

The Dynamics of Situational Work Illustrated

The following vignettes illustrate how situational work addresses a range of general and local contingencies, including the reform plan itself, which tended to create *indeterminate work situations* at the frontline. They further illustrate *practical modifications* of working arrangements to accommodate the contingencies in question. In all the vignettes, these practical modifications sought to rectify an indeterminate situation by rendering it more determinate and functional for local purposes. Finally, the vignettes illustrate how these modifications to the working order were *articulated* by street-level managers and others as viable ways of ensuring ongoing service delivery. Table 2 summarizes the different dimensions of situational work across all case offices.

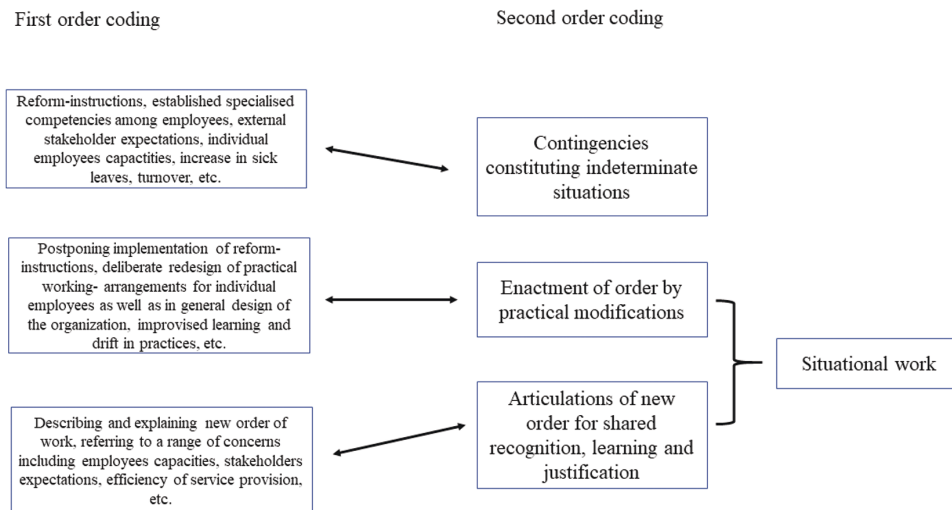


Figure 2. Two-Step Coding of the Characteristics of Situational Work.

Table 2. Examples of Different Aspects of Situational Work from All Offices

Dimensions of Situational Work	Office A (Vignette 1)	Office B (Vignette 2)	Office C	Office D (Vignette 3)	Office E	Office F
Complex contingencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Unclear reform ambitions clash with employee capacity for delivering services. * Sudden incidents of expectations of downsizing. * Resignation of supervisor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The reform initially creates unclear expectations and tasks to the employee's desks. * Workers' various cognitive and psychological capacities for handling the new situation. * Complexity of rule and knowledge systems. * Clients expectations of meeting specialists at the frontline. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Reform ambitions of cross-functional integration. * Revolt from social work professionals refusing cross-functional integration. * Clients expectations of being serviced by specialized professionals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The reform induces unexpected (surprising) consequences. * Expectations from external cooperating partners with narrow focus on services. * Expectations from workers to return to former divisions of work. * Difficulty for workers to learn the difficult systems and rule sets; span of workers' service responsibility is too wide. * Sudden increase in sick leave at the office. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Draining of competent staff to regional offices. * Unclear divisions of tasks between frontline offices and regional offices. * Conflicts among the former separate professionals, concerning ways of working. * Sudden increase in demands for services. * Workers refusing to work on "new" tasks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Reform ambitions of cross-functional integration. * Draining of competent staff to regional offices. * Sudden increase in demands for services.
Practical modifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * From integrating (generalist) teams to specialist teams. * Transforming cross-functional teams into one department, accommodating workers with various specialized competencies. * Creating special teams for specialized services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Deliberate modifications of individual workers work situation to ensure that they can handle it properly. * Shielding workers from parts of the reform to give frontline workers space for improvised learning and ad hoc modifications. * Giving workers status as "resource persons" within particular service areas. * Reducing task complexity by outsourcing specialized service areas as well as establishing specialized teams around particularly complex services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Placing social workers in a special team. * Making exceptions for them in the job rotation system. * Creating mechanisms for cross-functional sharing of information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Giving workers status as "contact persons" toward clients at the same time as maintaining specialized competencies among staff. * Arranging cross-functional meetings facilitating knowledge sharing across specializations. * Letting workers voluntarily experiment with expanded task portfolios. * Creating specialized teams around particularly demanding service areas. * Designed gradual experiment process of combining integration and specialization. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Giving workers status as "contact persons" toward clients at the same time as maintaining specialized competencies among staff. * Creating new forms of specializations across former divisions of services. * Creating ad hoc "homogenous teams" along former service lines to handle sudden increases in demands for services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Reduced integration ambitions, allowing for specialization of services along the lines of pre-reform specialization.
Discursive articulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * First, arguing in favor of not breaking up an order of work (two cross-functional teams) that functions. * Then acknowledging the malfunction of two-cross functional teams, and an informal drift of specialization of the two teams. * Formulating officially a new formal organization design. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Formulating the new division of work with reference to the need of creating a manageable work situation for the workers (as "not everyone can be expected to master the whole service specter"). * Justify specialization at the frontline to meet clients demands and provide better services within service areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Explaining the rational for specialization and division of work as necessary to make case processing more efficient. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Arguing in favor of a more specialized division of work with reference to: * The total span of services is complicated and makes it impossible to employ principle of generalist competence. * Need to combine and balance service specialization with integration across services. * Cooperation around individual clients across specialization, creates better services, as people can work with what they are good at. * Establishing "a well-functioning office rather than an ideal one" as main priority. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Creating new forms of specializations across former divisions of services to: (a) advance a new more integrated way of working and (b) reduce the task complexity and competency demand on the individual workers. * Declaring officially this new formal organization design. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Reduced reform ambitions due to: * High degree of turnover among staff. * Demands for "competent responses" from clients.

Vignette 1

One obvious *contingency* that contributed to the indeterminate situation at all local offices was the reform plan itself, which at the outset appeared obscure and confusing. When interviewed some weeks after the new office opened, the street-level manager in Office A highlighted this lack of clarity:

[We] were just faced with ideas and empty frames. We did not know how to find our way or what to do to make things work. It was like we had developed a big shell without any content. To figure out how to work in a new way, we had to develop new content. (SLM Office A, wave 1)

Other contingencies emerged later in the implementation process. For instance, 2 years after opening, Office A was instructed by regional management to downsize by one full position, which was challenging for this relatively small office. As one team leader also decided to quit her job, downsizing created a predicament for the street-level manager: whether to replace the team leader and accept the shortfall in frontline workers or make other practical arrangements (Office A, field notes, wave 3). The contingencies of downsizing and turnover interacted with another key contingency: established ways of working and specialist expertise, which initially clashed with the reform objective of service integration. Together, these intermeshed contingencies constituted an indeterminate work situation at the frontline.

To address this indeterminacy, the street-level manager in Office A made several *practical modifications*. One early modification was to introduce a more pragmatic organizational design than was provided for in the reform plan. While the plan specified the establishment of a single follow-up unit with frontline workers handling the whole spectrum of services, the pragmatic model assigned follow-up services to two “cross-functional teams ... each providing the whole spectrum of services” (SLM Office A, wave 2). Importantly, this meant that both teams included workers with specialized expertise in the different service areas rather than the more generalist expertise specified in the reform plan. However, by the time of our third field work visit, the two cross-functional teams had been restructured as one department with *three* specialized teams, which the manager said were “organized along the former divisions of work.” In addition, refugee services—one of the most complex functions—had been relocated as a special team in another department (SLM Office A, wave 3). Regarding the challenge of downsizing, the manager had decided not to replace the team leader who resigned (thereby downsizing the management positions) and instead assigned responsibility for all the new teams to the other remaining team-leader within the reconfigured department (Field notes, Office A, wave 3).

In Office A, practical modifications were accompanied by various *articulations* of the new working order and its underlying rationale, explaining how the new working order was emerging from informal experiential learning.

It has been difficult to organize with two parallel teams that from the beginning should cover the same set of services. As time went by, a division of work has been evolving, among other things because of their leaders being specialized from before on social security services

and labor market services, respectively. An informal drift of what the two teams has been doing has thus happened. (SLM Office A, wave 3)

One of the interviewed team leaders confirmed how these deviations from the initial reform plan was justified internally at the office as the viable working order ensuring service delivery:

I’m skeptical about pushing this principle [of service integration] too hard. We now have a division of work among the three teams that has been evolving and that seems to work. Now that it is working, we are not very happy about breaking up this structure again. (SP, Office A, wave 3)

The formal modification of the organizational design from three cross-functional teams covering all services to one department with three specialized teams, which represents an articulation of the emergent new working order, is thus justified internally with implicit reference to a range of concerns that have been accommodated through an informal drift of organizing. The need to maintain a sustainable working order at the frontline ensuring an adequate service delivery outweighed the concerns about implementing the reform in line with the official plan. However, the reform is still not rejected, but merely postponed:

We do not have capacity right now. ... We have talked about strengthening integration, but we haven’t managed to do so. In a few years, maybe we can start addressing the questions that reform raises. (SLM, Office A, wave 3)

As the street level manager explains, although the reform ambitions have to give way for other concerns in the present situation, in the future under other situational contingencies, the reform objectives might get a stronger foothold in the constellation of contingencies constituting the work situation at the street level organization.

Vignette 2

In Office B, the reform plan also constituted an *indeterminate work situation* at the outset, and a range of other contingencies emerged in its wake. One of these related to the proliferation of standards and routine descriptions to be implemented by the street-level organizations in the first phase of reform. Frontline workers often found it difficult to grasp these descriptions, further reinforcing the perceived lack of clarity about the work they were expected to perform in the new organization.

We must take on whatever arrives at our desk. It is learning by doing—we don’t know what to do with [these] cases ... Routine descriptions specify the new division of work, but I feel unable to make use of them. Still, we’re learning all the time. (FW Office B, wave 1)

Intermeshed with the issue of ambiguous standards and routines, another contingency was the declared ambition to develop what the reform plan characterized as the “generalist role” of frontline workers. In other words, the commitment to providing integrated services meant that each worker would

in principle handle any case assigned to them, representing a significant shift in terms of professional roles and expertise. Street-level managers noted that many frontline workers would find this difficult, not least because clients expected (and in some cases demanded) to deal with frontline workers who had the necessary specialist expertise to handle their case. In short, clients did not want generalists who lacked the necessary expertise (Field notes, Office B, wave 2), and this further contingency added to the indeterminacy of the office's work situations.

Our data also disclose a series of *practical modifications* introduced to address these contingencies. As elsewhere, the street-level manager postponed implementation of some reform elements to minimize the changes impacting frontline workers. As the manager explained, "We have gradually apportioned challenges so that people can digest them one at a time" (SLM, Office B, wave 2). Another modification addressed the declared reform ambition to turn workers into generalists. According to the manager, it was more practical "to adapt the situation for workers who could not cope with the new way of working" (SLM Office B, wave 2). To illustrate the point, the manager cited the case of a former social service worker who had a difficulty with client encounters at the front desk and was therefore assigned instead to a back-office function of processing social assistance applications, newly invented for the purpose of handling precisely this challenge.

Another practical modification involved the development of new role descriptions for frontline workers, where the manager experimented with positions somewhere between generalist and specialist. One such role was the "resource person."

By assigning some people the status of "resource person," we could operate with a kind of specialization in limited areas—not that many areas, but [for example] we have a specialist who deals with drug-related problems. In this area, one could easily lose overview of the complexity involved in service provision. (SLM, Office B, wave 2)

Improvisation and experiential learning were central to creating a viable work situation that supports continuous service delivery, including "learning by doing." In later conversations, the manager told us that further practical modifications had been made to reduce task complexity for frontline workers. Some complicated services, such as those provided to clients with significant drug-related or psychiatric problems, were outsourced to other municipal services. Another modification involved establishing interprofessional teams around clients with particularly complex needs, so reducing the need for generalist frontline workers. These modifications meant that municipal social services were gradually removed from the follow-up team's task portfolio; "in this way, [workers] are in a better position to cope with the many new rules and measures" (SLM, Office B, wave 3).

Articulations of the new order followed in a recursive relationship with practical modifications. The street-level manager of office B described how ad hoc improvisations helped to shape sustainable work situations for frontline workers. In retrospective articulations, the manager noted the need to balance reform ambitions of service integration against workers' capacity and clients' requests. In one so-called organizational development meeting for the whole office, the researchers observed the manager talking about a year of

practical learning to handle the new situation, describing, and explaining the new emergent order of work:

We can see that we have become functionally specialized in the reception. While it is possible to respond in general terms to clients' questions in some service areas, clients in other areas come well prepared and have too many questions that require specialist knowledge. In these areas, we decided to maintain the former specialized functions. (SLM Office B, public speech in internal meeting, wave 2)

It is notable how this improvised learning process is retrospectively acknowledged by the street-level manager ("We can see that we have become..."). One year later, the manager articulates the experiences from 2 years of trying to make the new situation at the office working. This articulation of the new working order illustrates how situational work is also aimed at figuring out how to ensure service delivery by practically accommodating a range of concerns:

Client follow-up and cross-functional integration have started to work. However, we have accepted that not everyone in the follow-up team can cope with the whole service spectrum. Some specialize in social work; some are good at following up people on sick leave; and some are good at vocational rehabilitation. People have a primary responsibility for their special areas and cooperate with others [with other special competencies]. (SLM Office B, wave 3)

As this retrospective account suggests, the street-level manager later justified these new ways of working developed through improvisation and learning by doing, as the official approach to service delivery ("we have accepted..." etc.). The manager's orientation can be interpreted as a pragmatic balancing of different specialist roles (e.g., "resource persons") with collaboration across specialized areas. As one union representative put it while confirming the street level managers articulation of the new working order, these modifications were vital "in order to get the situation to work" (UR Office B, wave 3).

Vignette 3

In Office D, the emerging contingencies following the reform also had unexpected consequences, prompting efforts to make an indeterminate situation more determinate and orderly, as the street-level manager noted in slightly ironic fashion: "In the beginning, I encountered one new surprise every hour. Now, it's twice a day" (SLM Office D, wave 2). The manager also reported that key stakeholders, both external and internal, were "screaming for the arrangements we used to have for the organization of services" (SLM Office D, wave 2), introducing significant contingencies that the manager struggled to relate to the new formal organizational model.

The responses from the [external] environment are complicated. We have external partners that expect to continue as before and only want to deal with the services that they are used to. I try to make them see that all the other services are now part of the organization, but it is hard to get through. This applies to external collaborators of all our former services.... (SLM, Office D, wave 2)

One year later, a sudden increase in sickness absence to 22%—a critical number for any organization—represented an additional contingency that had to be addressed to maintain the viability of service delivery (Field notes, Office D, wave 3).

To handle this emerging complexity, the street-level manager made *practical modifications* to the organizational model that combined several measures.

So, we established a working group to deal with all the screaming [from the stakeholders]. The group suggested reverting to a model resembling the former organization of services, with a specialized department to handle interactions with employers. We used some of the working group's suggestions and combined them with a model we had already been working on, based on the principle of one contact person dedicated to interactions with employers. (SLM Office D, wave 3)

The initial implementation strategy was to allow individual frontline workers to experiment voluntarily with expanded task portfolios, enabling them to develop the requisite competences to operate as “generalist contact persons” for individual clients in line with the reform objectives (Field notes, Office D, wave 1). This early experimentation was a practical way of accommodating conflicting demands for specialist expertise and service integration around clients' individual needs. The street-level manager explained that they initially adopted a “hybrid model [that] we moved towards step by step.” The idea was to ensure that all frontline workers would have a general overview of all services while specializing in one area (SLM Office D, wave 1). Two years later, however, the internal work environment controller explained that the official goal of service integration had been abandoned, highlighting the influence of managerial disapproval.

The office manager is rather strict about [preventing] “cross over” work, especially between state and municipality services. She refuses to allow people to take initiatives that would expand their task portfolio. (FW/Internal controller, Office D, wave 3)

Regarding *articulations* of the new order that emerged from these practical modifications, the street-level manager justified modifications of initial roles and integration efforts by reference to experiential learning: “When I started, I had a much more idealistic picture of the situation [...] Now, I doubt that one contact person can master all service areas, given the difficulties of learning the different systems and rule sets” (SLM Office D, wave 2).

Later, in the third round of fieldwork, the same manager articulated this shift of working order toward further specialization, even more clearly.

The role of the “contact person” is impossible—it's too complicated. So, we have dispensed with that concept and focused instead on general cooperation when possible. Team leaders' responsibilities are too wide-ranging (...), and this is impossible to handle. Managers must continue to cooperate but must return to their areas of specialization. What matters now is to make the office function. (SLM Office D, wave 3)

One frontline worker explained what this meant in practice, confirming the general validity of the articulation of the new working order at this point in time: “We adhere to a clear division of work between service areas to ensure that people work on the things they're good at.” (FW, follow-up team, Office D, wave 3). And a supervisor provided his version of the same:

We are trying to establish a well-functioning office rather than the ideal one specified by the reform goals, but we are struggling to make everything work. Certainly, the collocation of all the former services contributes to some degree of integration. People learn about each other's tasks, and while we have limited our integration ambitions, the organization is different than it was before the reform. (SP Office D, wave 3)

Here, the supervisor reinforces the street-level manager's articulation of the new working order by emphasizing the importance of creating and maintaining a viable and determinate work situation in pragmatic fashion rather than striving to meet reform ideals. He further contends that the reform process is still being enacted, as the emergent working order still represents a new approach to service provision.

The vignettes as Illustrations of Situational Work

These vignettes from three different offices illustrate how situational work unfolds as street-level managers make practical modifications to handle the complexity of contingencies associated with reform and its aftermath. This work involves both direct design actions and efforts to create a space for gradual development among frontline workers. Vignette 1 highlights the gradual transition from two cross-functional teams sharing the same task profile to a single department with three specialist teams. This emerging reorganization finally formalized in a new official organization design, sought to accommodate employees drift toward a more specialized division of work based on existing specializations and competencies, accentuated by unexpected downsizing and staff turnover. In Vignette 2, the street-level manager gradually downplayed the ambitious integration model and “shielded” workers by postponing the implementation of reform objectives. What looks like an implementation gap is in fact rooted in practical arrangements to alleviate specific work challenges and needs and to support learning by doing through ad hoc experimentation rather than enforcement of reform demands. In Vignette 3, the manager implemented the reform ambition of service integration incrementally, encouraging workers to experiment with the idea of a single contact person while maintaining previous specializations. This approach was driven by the need to accommodate reform while responding to diverse stakeholders' demands for a return to pre-reform arrangements.

Street-level managers articulated these provisions for shared recognition and consolidation of the new working orders emerging for ensuring ongoing service delivery. Articulations spanned from reformulations of organizational design in formal terms to more loosely retrospective characterizations of emergent working orders. Importantly, these articulations served to justify apparent implementation gaps. In Vignette 1, for instance, the new working order was articulated first in terms of a new formal

organization design that is further justified as an experimentally based “functioning working arrangement” to cope with the prevailing situation. Rather than rejecting the reform ideals, these were explicitly proclaimed as possibilities for the future rather than the present. In Vignette 2, the manager was careful to acknowledge the outcomes of improvised learning-by-doing in terms of specialized ways of working. New labels like “resource person” and “cross-functional team” signal the progress of reform ambitions while also addressing other concerns such as workers’ task-related needs. In Vignette 3, the street-level manager articulated how certain aspects of the reform goals had to be downplayed to create a viable work situation that would ensure efficient service delivery. Again, this is not a rejection of the reform but an articulation of the new working order’s characteristics, supported by reasons for its viability according to a range of concerns including but not exclusively or primarily the reform.

All six offices started out with high ambitions to fulfill the reform plans for service integration, which were modified over time as other contingencies intervened. Further, the determinate work situations that street-level managers sought to develop, remain unfinalized in the face of new emergent contingencies disturbing the emerging working order in different ways. Reform objectives, then, seem gradually crowded out as street-level managers’ attention turns to these emerging contingencies. Crucially, however, the return to specialized division of work should not be characterized as rejection or resistance, as the reform objective of service integration is processed alongside a range of other concerns. And as the street level manager in office A (Vignette 1) suggests, in the future, under different situational circumstances, the reform objectives might attain a stronger foothold among the constellation of contingencies constituting the work situation at the office. The efforts to create a viable working order, thus, result in a continuously emerging new order that accommodates conflicting contingencies (including reform instructions) by creating a more determinate whole that ensures the ongoing viability of service delivery.

Discussion and Conclusion: A Situation-Centric Perspective on Implementation

The article makes three contributions to the literature on organizational reform and policy implementation. The first contribution is conceptual, as *situational work* informs a more fine-grained understanding of gaps in reform implementation by reframing these as street-level managers’ constructive efforts to ensure implementation. This includes activities that often go unnoticed or are misinterpreted as opposition to or rejection of reform objectives (Christensen and Lægread 2007; Hirsch and Bermis 2009; Lozeau et al. 2002; Pache and Santos 2013). The second contribution is empirical, as the article extends the emerging and under-theorized concept of street-level management (Gassner and Gofen 2018) by highlighting the range of contingencies (beyond the reforms themselves) that street-level managers must handle in order to sustain a viable working order during periods of public reform. Third, we provide a theoretical contribution by outlining a situation-centric perspective on implementation that challenges the reform-centric perspective that dominates the public administration literature.

The literature on reform implementation emphasizes the need to align frontline workers’ actions and beliefs by means of measures like performance management, quality control, and enactment of procedures (Brodkin 2011; Drolc and Keiser 2021; Lipsky 2010; May and Winters 2009; Moynihan and Kroll 2015; Riccucci et al. 2004). Similarly, the institutional literature on implementation emphasizes the importance of shaping frontline workers’ understanding and perception of policy goals through sensemaking and sensegiving in (Brodkin 2011; May and Winter 2009; Riccucci et al. 2004), formation of attitudes (Keulemans and Groeneveld 2020), translation or adaptation of reforms into established practice (Radaelli and Sitton-Kent 2016; Rouleau and Balogun 2011), and institutional adaptation to accommodate reform (Cloutier et al. 2016; Perner and Skjølvik 2018). The concept of street level managers’ situational work challenges this reform-centric view on implementation by sensitizing to the variety of practical modifications that street-level managers make to handle a wide range of emerging contingencies associated with reform as well as with other sources activated in the wake of the reform. In this way, the concept of situational work illuminates how street-level managers’ perspectives during implementation are paradoxical: They are both extensive in scope in terms of encompassing all contingencies present in the situation, yet still limited by not extending beyond the context of this situation, thereby precluding any strategic or idealized approach to implementing reform. Instead, situational work underpins reform implementation by ensuring ongoing service delivery. In that sense, managing the complex work situations indirectly facilitates reform in practice.

A key aspect of street-level managers’ situational work is the articulation of the new working order to establish a shared conception of new ways of working based on accurate descriptions, including justifications of the new order in relation to concerns also other than the reform. In this regard, the articulation aspect of situational work differs from prevalent notions of managers’ discursive framing during implementation such as symbolic compliance with reform discourses or post hoc rationalization in terms of the reform objectives (Dimaggio and Powell 1983; Greenwood et al. 2011; Meyer and Rowan 1977; Westphal and Zajac 1997).

Situational work also differs from other related concepts in the public administration literature. For example, how workers handle “external and internal demands and conflicts they face on an everyday basis” is widely discussed in terms of “coping strategies” (Tummers et al. 2015, 1101–2), and “job crafting” refers to how workers redefine and reimagine their jobs in personally meaningful ways (Berg et al. 2013; Harju et al. 2016). Situational work differs from these concepts to the extent that its focus is organizational rather than individual, and it is enacted by street-level managers rather than by frontline workers.

The study has some limitations. We had no output data from the case offices to tell us how they rate on performance goals or how successful they were in implementing reform from the perspective of upper-tier strategic policy makers at NAV. For that reason, we were unable to assess precisely how situational work contributed to reform implementation; nor can we comment on the effect of variations in situational work as executed by the participating street-level managers at the different offices. What was clearly demonstrated in the analysis of the implementation

process is that the managers' situational work was crucial in order to maintain a viable working order and ensure the everyday service delivery.

To elaborate a theory of situational work and the effects of street-level managers' activities during reform, further research should employ a wider range of methods across a wider range of settings, assessing more specifically the criteria of successful situational work. We believe that dealing with everyday contingencies of the kind described here occupies a significant portion of street-level managers' time and attention in the early stages of reform implementation, not least because reforms, and especially organizational reforms, trigger exogenous jolts that disrupt the established working order. Future research should, however, also explore whether situational work captures a more general characteristic of street-level managers' work as street level organizations regularly experience confrontation between new policy measures, stakeholder expectations, and other emerging local contingencies. Such work is valuable in increasing understanding of the degree to which situational work is an effect of organizational reforms or whether it plays a broader part of the everyday life of street level management, in the processes of delivering public services while also continuously handling indeterminate work situations that may ensue.

Appendix: Additional Quotes

Analytic Descriptions (1st Order)	Quotes
<i>Indicators of contingencies constituting an indeterminate situation</i>	
Combination of (a) losing competent staff to newly established secondary line of case-processing agencies and (b) expectations of redistributing tasks among the frontline personnel clashing with their former experiences with working within specialized areas (Office F).	One problem is the office location; all NAV's regional administrations [named] are located here too, and turnover to these units left us with too few competent employees. You could say we have an "extreme sports" situation in relation to recruiting new employees. (SLM, Office F, December 2008)
Social workers grouped and "revolted" (as the SLM articulated it) against attempts to differentiate tasks, in efforts to maintain client demands for service functions with specialized social work competence (as the frontline workers articulated it) (Office C).	In the beginning, we were very ambitious [in pursuing] cross-functional integration, emphasizing that all employees should take their turn at reception in a job-rotation system. We did not differentiate reception from the follow-up department, and all workers were expected to rotate through the different functions. However, the social workers made it very clear that they found it beneath them to work in reception. (SLM, Office C, June 2008)
Combination of (a) reform signals experienced as obscure and shifting and (b) conflict among the former separate groups of professionals concerning "the right way of working" following in the wake of the reform (Office E).	One year ago, we were supposed to rotate on different functions and tasks, for instance to the reception function. But then the clients demanded to be routed directly to the social workers. (SLM, Office C, June 2008)
	The situation is unclear: the division of work between us and [the regional offices secondary line services] are unclear, characterized by misinformation and shifting concept of what tasks are to be performed where. (Office manager, Office E, November 2009)
	We see many examples of "us and them," particularly between former social services and national insurance. This tension is manifested in several areas. For instance, the governmental system for non-conformance reporting is characterized as the governmental gossip-system by the municipal social service employees. (UR, Office E, November 2009)
<i>Indicators of practical modifications</i>	
Practical modifications away from the initial fully integrated organization design, allowing for maintaining specialization according to former service areas among the employees (Office F).	We have reduced our ambitions. We have been conservative and careful. Although we initially complied with the central instructions, we never dared to go all in for a full cross-functional integration model. In the reception department especially, I didn't dare to dive into the integration model, and I was criticized for that. We were supposed to be working in a fully integrated manner after the first year of implementation, but I could see that this was not possible for us. (SLM, Office F, December 2008)
Re-specializing the provision of social services at the same time as enabling cross-functional integration by practical mechanisms of sharing information (Office C).	This prompted an evaluation meeting when it was decided that it was reasonable to organize the office in two teams, reception and follow up team, where all the social workers were in the follow up team [...]. A shift has happened the last year that means we have settled what is supposed to be our tasks. We, social workers, are supposed to concentrate on social services, but at the same time we are supposed to relate to the information that comes to the office on the other service areas. So, we relate to issues and information concerning the office as a whole at the same time as we live our life with our cases of social work. This is approved of by the management. (FW, Office C, June 2008)

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Conflict of Interest

The authors do not have any conflicts of interest to declare for this study.

Data Availability

The data underlying this article will be available at the data repository of The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD), accessible through the website [nsd.no](https://www.nsd.no) or upon request at nsd@nsd.no. The project-id of the data is 17861 *Evaluation of the NAV-reform, Module 3: Local Implementation*. Currently, the data-material are processed by the project-owner in order to secure the anonymity of the informants. Questions concerning the data can be addressed the project owner at Work Research Institute, Oslo Metropolitan University in Norway, knut.fossestol@oslomet.no.

Analytic Descriptions (1st Order)	Quotes
Re-specializing social security teams to handle a sudden change in contingencies stemming from increase in demand for such services (Office E).	There has been a sudden increase in social security cases. To handle this, we have returned to “homogenous social security” teams to ensure that the people who knows this area are processing the cases (SLM, Office E, November 2009)
Indicators of articulations of new work order	
Articulations that practical modifications of re-specializing divisions of work more in line with the former organization of (Office F).	As for the clients, what they want is not fully integrated service but competent responses to their questions. [...] In the follow-up department, we have reached a certain level of integration, but social services remain specialized [partly because] during the last year we have seen an explosion in the number of clients applying for social assistance, and we have trouble keeping up with demand as it is.” (SLM, Office F, December 2008)
Articulation of reasonable concerns for accommodating the social workers’ demands for maintain their specialized functions at the office (Office C).	Personally, I strongly dislike the classification of work as worthy or unworthy, but when we made the change, it was because we also saw that specialization of functions improved the flow of reception work and the continuity of follow up work. You could say that what started as a question of dignity and worthy or unworthy work evolved into a question of exploiting our competencies in the best possible ways. The employees have great respect for the specialist skills of others, so the threshold for asking colleagues for advice is low. However, this also involves extensive expenditure of time. Is it justifiable for one worker to spend half a day on a case that a more competent colleague could solve in ten minutes? My concern is how to deploy resources in a better way. (SLM, Office C, June 2008)
Articulation of the practical redesign of the organization of service provision as differentiated from the initial reform ideals as justified (Office E).	Rather than returning to the old specializations, we looked forward instead and constructed new ways of specializing [in three areas]: drug-related cases and mental health problems, the qualification program, and work and sick leave. These areas are more delimited and mixed than the former [division between] employment service, national insurance, and municipal social services. (SLM, Office E, December 2008)
Articulation of how other concerns than compliance with reform objectives have been prioritized to create space for developing the capacity for service delivery (Office A).	There have been several shifts. Patience is important. The most important job of the manager is to prioritize, let some of the balls go. We knew that the work capability assessment tool would arrive, and many voices expressed that it was unwise not to prepare for this. But then I decided that we cannot prioritize this among all the other tasks and things we must deal with. We also postponed the implementation of the qualification program. It was not the politically correct way to do it, but still we decided to do it in that way. (SLM, Office A, November 2009)
Articulation of decision to not replace the quitting team-leader as justified by highlighting experiences of how the office has been developing and “drifting” regarding the division of work (Office B).	It has been difficult to organize with two parallel teams that from the beginning should cover the same set of services. As time went by, a division of work has been evolving, among other things because of their leaders being specialized from before on social security services and labor market services, respectively. An informal drift of what the two teams has been doing has thus happened. (SLM, Office B, November 2009)

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