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Frontline Work and Integration

The Experiences of Integration Policy Implementers in Rural Municipalities

Master's Thesis in Sociology

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Abstract

This thesis explores the experiences of integration policy implementers in rural municipalities in Norway. It examines how these implementers navigate the challenges and opportunities of integrating immigrants and refugees into their communities. The study utilizes a theoretical framework largely based in street-level bureaucracy theory and draws on qualitative research methods, including interviews with integration policy implementers. The findings reveal that implementers face a number of challenges, including limited resources, lack of coordination between different actors, and resistance from local populations. However, the study also finds that implementers develop a range of coping mechanisms to address these challenges, including developing tacit knowledge, exercising discretion, and building relationships with immigrants and refugees. The thesis concludes that integration policy implementation in rural municipalities is a complex and multifaceted process that is shaped by a variety of factors, including the local context, the resources available, and the skills and attitudes of the implementers.

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Khaled Khan

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Introduction

Norway's strategic approach to integration, laid out in the policy documents, emphasizes a policy framework focused on diversity and inclusion. It stresses the critical role of providing equal opportunities for all residents to actively participate in both work and social activities, with the primary aim of enabling everyone in Norway to fully leverage their capabilities and contribute to the community. Employment is highlighted as a vital means for achieving participation and economic independence. The policy underscores the government's dedication to preparing immigrants for the Norwegian workforce by enhancing Norwegian language education and designing targeted training programs that align closely with labor market needs (*En helhetlig integreringspolitikk*, 2012). However, the effectiveness of the policy on the ground has been contested. Despite the emphasis on getting as many immigrants into employment as soon as possible, and the strong welfare state, which provides extensive resettlement and integration assistance to refugees, the integration policies have not succeeded in equalizing the initial inequalities between refugees and the rest of the population (Valenta & Bunar, 2010). This is despite the fact that the debate on the social economics of immigration and welfare is very present and has a strong influence on policy formulation (Ihle, 2014).

Norway has implemented a structured and comprehensive approach to immigrant integration through programs such as the Introduction Programme and the Norwegian Language Training and Social Studies Programme, established under the Introduksjonsloven of 2004. These programs go beyond basic language instruction to provide immigrants with a variety of skills and knowledge necessary for integration into Norwegian society. The Introduction Programme includes language education, civic orientation, and vocational training, offering a holistic preparation for newcomers (*Introduksjonsloven*, 2004). Meanwhile, the specific Norwegian Language Training and Social Studies Programme, updated as of 2023, focuses more intently on language skills that are critical for both professional and social interactions in Norway (*Opplæring i norsk og samfunnskunnskap*, 2023).

Norwegian policy focuses on labor market integration for immigrants, driven by structured programs designed to enhance their employment opportunities. Central to these initiatives is the Introduction Programme, a mandatory two-year project specifically for refugees and their family members. This program is structured to provide extensive language training, social studies, and job-specific training tailored to the labor market's requirements. The primary intention of the program is to equip participants with the essential cultural and linguistic skills deemed necessary for active and meaningful participation in Norwegian society. By offering a consistent and comprehensive educational framework, the program aims to facilitate the transition of immigrants into the workforce, supporting their path to economic self-sufficiency (OECD, 2022).

The Introduction Program however depends on the municipalities in which it is implemented. There are significant differences between municipalities in the organization and content of the introduction programs. The legal requirement for full-time, year-round programs is not met in all municipalities. Over 20% of municipalities do not meet the requirement to offer full-time programs to participants, and over 15% do not meet the requirement for year-round programs. Municipalities with lower resettlement rates are more likely to meet these requirements than municipalities with higher resettlement rates (Djuve et al., 2017). The law also states that each participant of the introduction program should have an individual plan, which requires a broad range of local services. For some municipalities, this is a clear challenge. It seems to be particularly difficult to establish internship opportunities for participants with limited educational experience and weak Norwegian language skills (Djuve et al., 2017).

A high political prioritization of the introduction work has been highlighted as a possible success criterion for the integration work. Djuve et al. (2017) find support for this view. Municipalities where the introduction work has been given political anchoring have a broader cooperation profile than municipalities that have not anchored the integration work in municipal plans. The municipalities with political anchoring also report having access to a wider range of educational and socially oriented measures. The differences do not seem to be controlled by the size of the

municipality. However, the possible connection between political anchoring and access to work-oriented measures is more unclear. While introduction units with good political anchoring have a somewhat broader work-oriented range of measures in medium-sized municipalities, the relationship is opposite in large municipalities (Djuve et al., 2017).

Norway's approach to implementing immigration integration policies is a multi-tiered collaboration between different levels of government. This intricate structure involves various national ministries, such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion and the Ministry of Education and Research, which work in conjunction with a network of local municipal entities. The division of responsibilities in Norway's immigration integration framework is intended to ensure efficient and effective implementation of policies (*En helhetlig integreringspolitikk*, 2012).

The Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi) plays a key role in both implementing and advancing the government's integration policy. Working closely with municipalities, state agencies, the private sector, and voluntary organizations, IMDi is responsible for facilitating the settlement of refugees, helping them transition from introduction programs to work or education, and managing significant financial grants in the integration sector. Since 2013, IMDi has also assumed responsibility for administering subsidies for training and Norwegian social studies for adult immigrants, previously managed by county governors, highlighting its central function in policy implementation and resource distribution (*En helhetlig integreringspolitikk*, 2012).

At the municipal level, local governments are instrumental in the practical implementation of Norway's integration policy. Municipalities are charged with various tasks such as conducting introduction programs, offering Norwegian language training to newly arrived immigrants, and ensuring equal access to services for all residents. The effective management and leadership of integration initiatives by municipalities are crucial for developing a holistic, long-term strategy that achieves successful integration outcomes. Municipalities must integrate the specific needs of immigrants into the broader municipal planning, requiring a tailored approach that accommodates local conditions and challenges. This autonomy enables municipalities to address unique local needs, such as providing specific programs for refugees or offering customized

information on tax and housing policies to immigrant workers, ensuring that integration efforts are both effective and contextually relevant (*En helhetlig integreringspolitikk*, 2012).

The effectiveness of this collaborative model, however, has been a subject of ongoing discussion. While it allows for flexibility and adaptation to local circumstances, concerns have been raised about disparities in resource allocation and implementation quality across different municipalities (OECD, 2022). It is suggested that variations in local capacity and political will can lead to uneven outcomes for immigrants, with some municipalities better equipped to deliver comprehensive integration services than others (Gjerstad et al., 2015). This highlights the need for continued monitoring and evaluation of integration efforts at both national and local levels to ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities for all newcomers.

Frontline work in Norway, particularly within the realm of social welfare, embodies a complex interplay of discretion, flexibility, and regulatory compliance, essential for effective integration and support of immigrants. Frontline workers, often social workers, are pivotal in shaping how policies are enacted on the ground. These workers harness their discretion to tailor interventions to the unique needs of each immigrant, thereby ensuring a more personalized and effective approach to integration. For instance, while a social worker might prioritize daycare for the children of a newly arrived refugee to facilitate language learning for the parent, they might focus on securing internship opportunities for a skilled immigrant to enhance their professional integration (Hagelund, 2010).

Flexibility in their roles allows frontline workers to identify and connect immigrants with the most pertinent resources, be it affordable housing, healthcare, or language classes suited to their specific circumstances. This ability to navigate and utilize various resources and programs is crucial for fostering successful immigrant integration in Norway (Hagelund, 2009).

However, the work of frontline workers is also shaped by the broader characteristics of the Norwegian welfare system. Lundberg and Syltevik (2016) examine how frontline workers navigate the complexities of their roles within a welfare bureaucracy, highlighting the ways they fill discretionary spaces with various activities and how their interactions are shaped by welfare

"officialdom," boundary work, and the management of stigma. The authors conclude that both longstanding and emerging tensions manifest and are managed at the frontline, with the implementation of digital technologies potentially creating new barriers for service users. They advocate for increased attention to these evolving challenges, suggesting a need for further research and policy considerations to ensure equitable and effective welfare services in the digital age (Lundberg & Syltevik, 2016).

Furthermore, frontline workers are often caught between the dual responsibilities of enforcing regulations and assisting clients. For example, decisions about imposing sanctions on benefit recipients who violate rules are particularly challenging, highlighting the discretionary power frontline workers hold and how they use it to influence the implementation of social policies. Susana Vilhena (2021) explores how caseworkers handle situations when clients do not meet official requirements. Before deciding on sanctions, caseworkers evaluate whether a client's failure to comply is due to unwillingness or an inability, guided by loose regulations that focus on the client's will and capabilities. This process is complex and involves judgments about the client's "deservingness" of assistance, based on their behavior and personal circumstances (Vilhena, 2021).

Overall, the role of frontline workers in Norway is integral and multifaceted. Researchers like Gjersøe et al., (2020) have observed that social workers often adopt a "maternalistic" approach—balancing the enforcement of rules with the provision of care and support. This approach is essential in managing the competing demands of their roles, such as aiding clients in finding employment while ensuring compliance with welfare regulations (Gjersøe et al., 2020). Through their daily interactions, frontline workers significantly shape the practical application of Norway's welfare policies, illustrating the critical nature of their roles in the social fabric of the nation.

Study Objectives

Arriving in Norway as a refugee, I found myself in a small municipality in Trøndelag, where I joined the Introductory Program aimed at facilitating the integration of refugees like me into

Norwegian society. Little did I know that this experience would significantly shape my academic and professional trajectory.

During the program, I had the opportunity to interact closely with frontline workers and professionals responsible for implementing integration policies. It was through these encounters that I began to notice a stark disconnect between the policies outlined on paper and their real-world application for immigrants. This observation kindled a curiosity within me, prompting me to explore the complexities of integration policies further.

Years later, as I pursued my bachelor's degree in sociology, I stumbled upon the concept of street-level bureaucracy theory. This theory provided me with a new lens through which to understand my observations from the time when I was in the Introduction Program. The theory of street-level bureaucracy highlighted the significant role of frontline workers in shaping the implementation of policies, often within the constraints of limited resources and competing priorities.

Inspired by this newfound understanding, I became increasingly interested in the under-researched area of how frontline workers in municipalities carry out integration policies. I realized that their experiences, challenges, and decision-making processes were crucial in understanding the outcomes of integration efforts.

This was one reason that I chose my master's thesis to focus on the intricate implementation of integration policies and the various factors that influence their application. Through this work, I aim to better comprehend the challenges and possibilities experienced by frontline workers and contribute to a more thorough understanding of these policies' impact on immigrants.

Ultimately, my objective is to equip policymakers with unbiased, high-quality research that will drive evidence-based decision-making, ensuring that policies are effective, efficient, and equitable. By exploring the realities faced by frontline workers in Norwegian municipalities, particularly the distinct challenges and variability in smaller settings like Øksnes, this thesis provides valuable insights. It investigates how personal experiences, professional backgrounds,

and work environments influence their approach to implementation and their perception of their roles.

Research Question

The scope and aim of this master's thesis are determined by two related questions: *(1) What factors influence the practices of frontline workers in integration policy implementation in Øksnes? And (2) How do these frontline workers cope with these factors?*

This master's thesis focuses on the experiences and practices of frontline workers in smaller Norwegian municipalities, like Øksnes, as they implement national integration policies. The central research questions delve into how these workers carry out these policies and the factors that influence their implementation practices. The study will also examine how a range of factors impact their work and how they cope with these challenges.

The study contributes to the discussion of policy implementation and frontline work in three ways. Firstly, they address the dynamic interplay between national policy directives and local implementation realities, highlighting the critical role of frontline workers in shaping integration efforts at the grassroots level. By focusing on smaller municipalities, the study provides insights into the unique challenges and opportunities faced by these frontline workers in integrating immigrants and refugees.

Secondly, the study aims to uncover the personal and professional experiences of frontline workers, shedding light on the human dimension of integration work. It seeks to understand how frontline workers' values, attitudes, and professional expertise influence their practices regarding implementing integration policies.

Thirdly, this study investigates the factors that might uncover the gap between policy and practices, such as organizational resources, institutional arrangements, and political contexts, on integration efforts. It explores how these conditions shape the opportunities and constraints faced by frontline workers and how they adapt their strategies accordingly.

By investigating these aspects, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges and successes in integrating immigrants and refugees into Norwegian society. It seeks to provide practical insights for policymakers, practitioners, and other stakeholders involved in integration efforts, fostering more effective and inclusive approaches to integration.

The scope of this study is deliberately narrow, concentrating on specific factors that influence the practices of frontline workers in policy implementation in Øksnes. This focus is driven by the empirical evidence gathered through interviews. While it would ideally encompass all possible influencing factors, resource constraints necessitate a more manageable research project.

The factors selected for this study include both those that pose challenges to the work of frontline workers and those that facilitate their practices. Challenging factors might include limited resources, bureaucratic constraints, or conflicting policy directives, which can hinder effective implementation. On the other hand, facilitating factors may involve supportive organizational structures, professional training, and positive community engagement, which aid in carrying out their duties effectively.

In this research, a theoretical framework was put together to unravel the complexities of policy implementation at the frontline. Lipsky's Street-Level Bureaucracy Theory provided a foundational understanding of how frontline public service workers exercise discretionary power and influence policy delivery. As the research progressed, it became evident that a broader theoretical lens was necessary to capture the multifaceted nature of policy implementation in the context of refugee and immigrant integration. To address this, I enhanced the framework by incorporating concepts of bureaucratic inertia and tacit knowledge. These additions allowed for a deeper examination of the subtle, often unspoken factors that influence how policies are enacted on the ground by those directly responsible for their implementation.

This thesis is organized into several sections designed to provide an examination of the implementation of refugee and immigrant integration policies in Øksnes municipality.

The introduction provides an overview of the research question, aims, and significance of the study, setting the context for the subsequent chapters.

The literature review situates the research within the existing body of knowledge on integration policy and public administration theories, establishing the theoretical foundation for the analysis.

The methodology section details the qualitative approaches used in the study, including the design of interviews and selection of participants.

The results section presents the findings from the interviews, providing empirical evidence which is discussed in the light of existing literature in the next section.

The discussion section analyzes and evaluates the results by comparing them with theoretical frameworks and existing literature.

The conclusion summarizes the key findings and their implications for policymakers, practitioners, and other stakeholders involved in integration efforts. It suggests directions for future research and includes recommendations.

Theory and Literature Review

In constructing my theoretical framework, I used Charles Kivunja's contribution (2018) on developing a theoretical framework as a starting point (Kivunja, 2018). He posits that the theoretical framework comprises existing theoretical perspectives that a researcher or a student may interpret as relevant to his or her research and in particular in data analysis and interpretation.

According to Kivunja (2018), the theoretical framework of a research study is not merely a collection of random thoughts but a meticulously synthesized understanding of major theoretical contributions related to the specific research question. This synthesis involves interpreting and integrating insights from leading scholars in the field to construct a specialized lens through which the researcher examines and analyzes data. It provides a structured perspective that not only guides the analysis and interpretation of findings but also shapes the subsequent discussion, recommendations, and conclusions of the study (Kivunja, 2018, p. 46). This approach ensures that the investigation is grounded in established knowledge while also tailored to address the specific nuances and challenges of the research problem at hand.

Kivunja (2018) emphasizes that a theoretical framework is a crucial analytical tool in research, providing structure and direction to the process of data analysis and interpretation. While existing theories can offer valuable insights, they might not fully explain the nuances found in specific research data due to their generalized nature. Therefore, researchers should tailor a theoretical framework that aligns with their unique research question and problem statement. This framework acts as a lens through which to view and interpret data, guiding the identification of patterns and relationships within the findings. To construct a robust theoretical framework, a comprehensive literature review is essential. By thoroughly examining relevant literature, researchers can synthesize existing knowledge and identify gaps, ultimately shaping a framework that best serves their research objectives and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the topic under investigation (Kivunja, 2018, pp. 49-52).

The formulation of the theoretical framework for my research project was a process that began with literature review at the outset of the project and continued to evolve through the course of my data collection. The final product I have is a robust theoretical framework that draws mainly upon the seminal work of Michal Lipsky (1980), particularly his influential "Street-Level Bureaucracy" theory. This theoretical framework serves as a lens through which to analyze the intricate processes of policy implementation from the ground level up, shedding light on the nuances and challenges encountered by frontline workers.

In my thesis, I have adopted Lipsky's Street-Level Bureaucracy theory, which highlights the pivotal role of discretion in the intricate environment of policy implementation. Discretion, as discussed by Lipsky (1980), can be leveraged as a conceptual tool that illuminates the function of frontline workers who, through their discretionary practices, navigate the complex and often contradictory demands of their roles within constrained organizational settings. This view regards frontline workers not solely as implementers of policy but as active agents whose personal subjectivities and professional judgments significantly shape the real-world outcomes of policy initiatives. By integrating the concept of coping mechanisms into this framework, my thesis aims to explore the strategies employed by street-level bureaucrats to manage the inherent stresses and resource limitations of their jobs. This expanded lens offers a more nuanced understanding of how these workers sustain their performance and maintain service delivery despite systemic challenges, thus providing a richer analysis of the dynamics at play in public administration.

Moreover, my theoretical framework further incorporates the concepts of policy alienation and institutional inertia to address the broader contextual factors influencing public service delivery. The notion of policy alienation as discussed by Tummers and Bekkers (2009) highlights the emotional and professional disconnect that frontline workers can experience when their values and expertise clash with the policies they are mandated to enforce. This sense of alienation can significantly diminish their motivation and effectiveness, thereby undermining policy implementation. On the other hand, inertia in bureaucracies and organizations is understood (Jovita & Nurmandi, 2022; Rosenbaum, 2022) to underscore the resistance to change endemic

within bureaucratic structures, which stifles innovation and adaptability. To complement these perspectives, I also emphasize the role of tacit knowledge in the practical execution of policies. Tacit knowledge (Jon-Arild Johannessen, 2022; Polanyi, 1966; Kucharska & Rebelo, 2022; Cox Iii et al., 2008), or the unarticulated expertise that frontline workers develop through experience, is crucial for adaptive and context-sensitive decision-making. By acknowledging these diverse but interconnected factors, my framework aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted challenges in policy implementation, ultimately informing strategies that enhance the effectiveness and responsiveness of public service systems.

Balancing Decisions

Michael Lipsky's groundbreaking book, "Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services," published in 1980, revolutionized the field of public administration. Lipsky introduced the concept of "street-level bureaucrats." These frontline workers, including teachers, police officers, and social workers, play a crucial role in implementing government policies. Lipsky highlighted that these individuals possess substantial discretionary power, directly influencing citizens' experiences with government services (Lipsky, 1980, 2010). This notion has profoundly impacted the field, becoming an essential analytical tool that reveals the intricacies of public service delivery and challenging traditional hierarchical perspectives of policy enforcement (Gilson, 2015; Hupe & Buffat, 2014; Kosar, 2011). The practical implications of Lipsky's insights have led to a more sophisticated understanding of public service complexities among practitioners (Rowe, 2012). Further research inspired by Lipsky, exploring organizational contexts, policy designs, and workers' motivations, has enriched the discourse on street-level bureaucracy, demonstrating the nuanced interplay between policy intentions and on-the-ground realities (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000).

Raymond W. Cox III (2005) defines discretion as the judgment exercised by administrative officials in determining which agency activities should be prioritized. It rests on the premise that officials constantly face choices with consequences for both their agency and the public. Cox III adds that discretion necessitates both the need for and the ability to make sound judgments, driven by the specific circumstances of a given situation that falls outside of routine procedures.

Ensuring that bureaucrats exercise discretion "rightly" is a central concern. According to CoxIII, this capacity goes beyond mere good intentions or intellectual ability; it requires a preconceived notion of what constitutes "right" action, a precise evaluation of the situation, and a guiding ethical and political framework that establishes boundaries for behavior and empowers action (Cox Iii, 2005)

Discretion, the ability of public officials to make decisions within the bounds of their roles, has been a central concept in bottom-up theories of policy implementation since the 1950s (Imperial, 2021). It is particularly crucial for professionals working with immigrants and refugees, who must navigate fluctuating political climates, public opinions, and evolving laws. However, the use of discretion has also raised concerns about potential misuse by bureaucrats (Ray, 2010).

Thomann et al. (2018) consider that top-down theoreticians perceive frontline discretion as a control concern, contending that it ought to be minimized to guarantee policy compliance. These theorists believe that room for interpretation substantially heightens the possibility of a discrepancy between policy means and objectives (Thomann et al., 2018, p. 583). Kenneth Culp Davis (1970), a key figure in this debate, acknowledged the necessity of discretion for administrative flexibility but also cautioned against potential misuse. In response, he proposed the concept of "structured discretion" in 1970, advocating for clear guidelines to direct discretionary decisions within legal boundaries (Davis, 1970). This approach aimed to mitigate arbitrary actions and promote transparency, fairness, and accountability in government agencies.

Michael Lipsky (1980) challenges the traditional negative view of discretion in public bureaucracies, arguing instead that it is an essential component of effective policy implementation. He contends that frontline workers, such as police officers and social workers, must exercise discretion due to the complex nature of their work and the broad mandates they operate under (Lipsky, 1980). These workers play a crucial role in translating broad policy goals into individualized decisions on the ground, ensuring that public services meet the diverse needs of the population. While acknowledging potential risks, Lipsky (1980) emphasizes the necessary aspects of discretion, viewing it as indispensable for the nuanced application of policies and the successful bridge between policy formulation and implementation.

Lipsky (1980) articulates that the nature of street-level bureaucracy forms a complex syndrome where client-worker interactions are integral, making it challenging to streamline or simplify the bureaucratic framework. He suggests that the conditions defining this work context—including ambiguous goals, elusive performance metrics, and the essential need for discretion—are inherently linked and resistant to change. The complexity and "looseness" of these environments are likely to persist unless there is a fundamental shift in the underlying assumptions of the service policy. This is because human judgment is indispensable in managing the ambiguities inherent in service delivery, reinforcing the premise that the inherent conditions of street-level bureaucracy necessitate such judgment (Lipsky, 1980, p. 199).

Leveraging Lipsky's perspective (1980) on discretion is valuable to my research in several ways. First, it allows me to examine the working conditions of frontline bureaucrats. By recognizing the necessity of discretion, I can gain a deeper understanding of the challenges these professionals face and the strategies they employ to navigate complex situations. Second, Lipsky's work (1980) sheds light on how policies are translated into action on the ground and how frontline workers' discretion influences the effectiveness and responsiveness of public services. I can leverage this insight to analyze policy implementation in my research. Finally, the framework based on Lipsky's work (1980) enables me to evaluate the impact of discretion by considering both the potential risks and benefits. This balanced approach can help me assess the overall impact of discretion on the quality and equity of public service delivery.

Building on Lipsky's articulation (1980) about the crucial role of discretion in effective policy implementation, Gilke and Tummers' research (2018) delves into how street-level bureaucrats utilize this discretion, particularly in assessing the deservingness of their clients. Their work suggests that frontline workers, like those in Øksnes assisting refugees and immigrants, might employ similar judgments in allocating resources, especially under conditions of scarcity and policy ambiguity (Gilke & Tummers, 2018).

Gilke and Tummers (2018) propose that street-level bureaucrats face significant challenges, including heavy workloads, competing priorities, and limited resources. To manage effectively,

these bureaucrats often prioritize clients, sometimes at the expense of others (p. 236). One key factor in this prioritization process is the perception of deservingness. The authors suggest a theoretical model comprising three types of deservingness cues that bureaucrats use to determine assistance: earned deservingness (i.e., the client deserves help because of their hard work and effort), needed deservingness (i.e., the client needs help due to their circumstances), and resource deservingness (i.e., the client is likely to succeed based on bureaucratic success criteria) (Jilke & Tummers, 2018, p. 228). To examine the effectiveness of these cues, the authors conducted an experimental conjoint design study with a nationwide sample of US teachers. Their findings revealed that needed deservingness was the most influential cue in determining which students to help, particularly those with low academic performance and members of minority groups. Earned deservingness had a lesser, but still significant effect, while resource deservingness showed no impact on teachers' decisions (pp. 234-7).

In my thesis, I examine how frontline workers in Øksnes make complex decisions regarding resource allocation to refugees and immigrants. To do this, I can draw on the research and theoretical model proposed by Jilke and Tummers (2018). This model provides a lens for understanding discretion by highlighting the relational and ethical aspects of bureaucratic decision-making, challenging traditional views that prioritize adherence to procedures. Jilke and Tummers (2018) emphasize an empathetic, needs-based approach and advocate for policies that acknowledge and address client vulnerabilities. This aligns with Lipsky's view of discretion as a bridge between policy goals and their practical implementation.

To explore how frontline workers in Øksnes navigate these complex decisions, I will apply the concept of "deservingness cues". This concept suggests that factors such as perceived need, earned merit, and resource availability influence the level of assistance provided. By applying this concept, I can gain a deeper understanding of how frontline workers make these difficult decisions.

Disconnection and Discontent

Alienation broadly refers to a sense of social estrangement, an absence of social support or meaningful social connection. Its use in scientific literature can be traced directly to Hegel and Marx (Marx, 1844 as cited in Tummers, 2013, p. 8), who both saw capitalism as the main cause of alienation. Sociologists, public administration scholars and other social scientists have since used the alienation concept in various studies, thereby building upon Marx. For instance, Pandey and Kingsley (2000) have shown that work alienation is a strong predictor of the degree of red tape that public employees experience (Pandey & Kingsley, 2000 as cited in Tummers, 2013, p. 8).

Lipsky's seminal work (1980) touches upon the alienating aspect of frontline work. He writes:

Some of the ways lower-level workers can withhold cooperation within their organizations include such personal strategies as not working (excessive absenteeism, quitting), aggression toward the organization (stealing, cheating, deliberate wasting), and negative attitudes with implications for work (alienation, apathy). Workers may take advantage of collective resources to act non-cooperatively by forming trade unions or by exercising rights under collective bargaining agreements or civil service regulations. These collective strategies for noncooperation contribute to workers' willingness to display lack of motivation and to perform at only minimal levels. (Lipsky, 1980, p. 17).

Building on the concept of alienation, Tummers, Bekkers, and Steijn (2009) conceptualized 'policy alienation' and proposed how it can be used in policy implementation research. They define policy alienation "as a general cognitive state of psychological disconnection from the policy programme being implemented, here by a public professional who regularly interacts directly with clients," (Tummers et al., 2009). The construct of policy alienation is posited to have two characteristic dimensions: "powerlessness" and "meaninglessness" (Tummers, 2012).

Strategic powerlessness is the perception that professionals lack influence on policy decisions, as reflected in rules and regulations. This can occur, for instance, when a new policy is created without the involvement of relevant professional associations or labor unions, thereby excluding

their input (Tummers, 2012, p. 518). Tactical powerlessness describes professionals' perceived restricted influence over policy implementation decisions within their organization. Engaging professionals in working groups or meetings related to policy execution can alleviate feelings of powerlessness during organizational implementation. On the contrary, management's decision to exclude professionals from involvement can exacerbate this feeling. The more professionals perceive their influence on policy implementation decisions, the less tactical powerlessness they experience (p. 518).

Operational powerlessness refers to the level of influence professionals perceive they have during the hands-on implementation of a policy. It centers on the degree of control and autonomy professionals feel they possess as they carry out the policy's directives. While the tactical level concerns the organization's execution methods, operational powerlessness specifically addresses the individual practitioner's perceived discretion within this process. Strict, inflexible procedures can leave professionals feeling operationally powerless. This phenomenon is intensified when professionals who anticipate significant discretion are met with the limitations of bureaucratic control. In essence, the more professionals perceive they have the freedom to make choices during policy implementation, the less they experience operational powerlessness (Tummers, 2012, p. 518).

The second dimension of policy alienation is meaninglessness. In the realm of public policy implementation, societal meaninglessness arises when professionals perceive a disconnect between policy initiatives and their intended societal impact. This disconnect can manifest as a lack of perceived added value towards achieving relevant social goals, such as the provision of security or other essential public services. Public professionals, burdened with the sheer volume of initiatives and the scarcity of resources, have a sense of powerlessness in effecting meaningful change. This feeling of societal meaninglessness can be particularly acute in the public sector, where professionals are acutely aware of the discrepancy between policy aspirations and their practical outcomes in delivering desired public goods and services (Tummers, 2012, p. 518).

At the client level, meaninglessness reflects professionals' perceptions of the value added for their clients when implementing a policy. Unlike societal meaninglessness, which considers the

perceived value of the policy in relation to broader societal goals, client meaningfulness focuses on the individual benefits experienced by the "clients" of the professionals. When professionals perceive that their actions genuinely help their clients, they are likely to experience low levels of client meaningfulness (Tummers, 2012, p. 518).

Meaninglessness with the context of policy alienation (Tucker et al., 2022; Tummers, 2012; Tummers et al., 2009), has been associated with the psychological well-being policy implementers (Usman et al., 2021). Client meaningfulness and societal meaningfulness can potentially disrupt professionals' predisposed belief systems and established behavioral patterns in executing policy work at the frontline. This disruption can lead to a negative emotional attachment to the organization, which can, in turn, harm their psychological well-being. Street-level bureaucrats who feel unable to effectively serve their clients and society may develop this negative attachment. Such alienation from government policies can severely impact their mental health, resulting in diminished psychological well-being (Usman et al., 2021, p. 289).

The concept of "policy alienation" provides a highly relevant and insightful framework for my thesis on the challenges of policy implementation by frontline workers in Øksnes. The identification of dimensions such as powerlessness, meaningfulness, can significantly enhance the analysis of how these workers perceive and engage with integration policies. The dimension of powerlessness can shed light on the frustrations and limitations that frontline workers encounter due to scarce resources, constrained decision-making authority, and mismatch between policy goals and bureaucratic system requirements. This can explain variations in policy implementation and effectiveness across different settings. The concept of meaningfulness explores whether the policies being implemented resonate with or contradict local values and goals, potentially affecting the motivation and dedication of workers.

System Traps

Bureaucracy, originating from the root word "bureau," initially referred to the cloth covering desks of French government officials in the 18th century. Over time, the term has evolved to

signify the growth of organizations staffed by officials whose work involves numerous processes (Jovita & Nurmandi, 2022). Bureaucratic inertia is a phenomenon characterized by government employees' reluctance to make decisions that could lead to more socially beneficial outcomes. This behavior is attributed to a combination of factors, including risk aversion, adherence to formal procedures, and the existence of an incentive system that rewards decision restraint (Ritchie, 2014).

Although formalized decision-making processes in bureaucratic organizations are designed to support innovation, they often become overly bureaucratic and hinder change. This excessive bureaucracy makes government agencies less inclined to innovate, as they face complex practical realities that foster a culture of risk aversion. Additionally, bureaucratic inertia arises from civil servants optimizing their choices within given constraints, using their discretion to navigate these limitations (Jovita & Nurmandi, 2022, p. 1268).

Bureaucratic inertia is heavily influenced by the interests of bureaucrats, particularly regarding how policies, innovations, or changes impact them. When a policy aligns with bureaucratic interests, it is adopted more readily with minimal alterations in its implementation. Conversely, policies that do not align with bureaucratic preferences are rarely executed effectively. In larger organizations, this inertia becomes more pronounced, as the hierarchical structure allows each level of civil service to exercise its discretion. These traits of bureaucratic inertia are especially evident in disaster management operations (Jovita & Nurmandi, 2022, p. 1268).

Rosenbaum (2022) has studied inertia from an institutional perspective, arising from a complex culture. He argues that institutions are socially accepted rules, which not only reinforce themselves but are also supported by complex cultural beliefs. These factors prevent quick changes, resulting in what Rosenbaum (2022) calls institutional inertia. This means that people receive positive feedback from following these rules, because any change requires learning, which takes time. This slows down the process of modifying existing institutions or adopting new rules. However, institutional inertia is not entirely negative, according to him. These institutions are crucial to the structure of our societies because they operate without needing an enforcer, avoiding the question of who enforces the rules. For institutions to function effectively,

they must be deeply rooted in people's minds and cultural beliefs. Rapid changes could undermine their ability to guide and limit actions. Therefore, their stability is essential for their social acceptance and the potential for transformative change (Rosenbaum, 2022).

Within the context of my research of integration policy implementation in Øksnes municipality, the concept of bureaucratic inertia will enable me to analyze the challenges and barriers faced by the local government in adapting and innovating integration policies. Øksnes municipality, like many others, operates within a framework of established procedures and cultural norms that shape decision-making processes. By examining the role of bureaucratic inertia, I can identify specific instances where risk aversion, adherence to formal procedures, and incentive structures have either hindered or facilitated the implementation of integration policies.

Firstly, understanding bureaucratic inertia will help in pinpointing the areas where civil servants in Øksnes municipality exhibit reluctance to adopt new integration policies. This could be due to fear of negative outcomes, resistance to change, or a preference for maintaining the status quo. By mapping out these areas, I can propose strategies to mitigate such inertia, such as introducing incentives for innovative practices, providing training to reduce fear of change, and streamlining procedures to make them more adaptable.

Secondly, the concept of bureaucratic inertia will shed light on how the interests of bureaucrats influence policy implementation. In Øksnes, if integration policies align with the personal or professional interests of bureaucrats, they are likely to be implemented more effectively. Conversely, policies that challenge these interests may face significant resistance. Understanding these dynamics can guide the development of policies that are more likely to gain bureaucratic support or, alternatively, devise methods to counteract potential resistance.

Additionally, examining bureaucratic inertia within Øksnes municipality will reveal how hierarchical structures impact policy implementation. In larger organizations, each level of the hierarchy can exercise discretion, which can either facilitate or impede policy changes. By analyzing how different levels of the municipal hierarchy respond to integration policies, I can identify potential bottlenecks and areas where discretionary power is used to maintain inertia.

This analysis will inform the design of more effective implementation strategies that account for the hierarchical nature of the organization.

Furthermore, Rosenbaum's (2022) concept of institutional inertia is particularly relevant in the context of Øksnes municipality. The deep-rooted cultural beliefs and socially accepted rules that underpin the municipality's institutions play a crucial role in the stability and acceptance of integration policies. By recognizing the importance of these cultural factors, I can propose approaches that respect and leverage existing institutional frameworks while gradually introducing necessary changes. This approach ensures that policies are not only accepted but also sustainably integrated into the municipal system.

Tacit Knowledge

Frontline workers work in dynamic work environments, with ever changing clients they interact with and shifts in the policies and public and political opinions, as well as the policies and laws that provide their daily jobs frameworks. New and unforeseen challenges necessitate thinking outside the box. Multi-actor collaboration has been suggested (Torfing, 2019) to be an effective way of spurring innovation in the public sector. Leveraging tacit knowledge that frontline workers accumulate through years of interpersonal experiences can be crucial here. Tacit knowledge is hard to codify and specify, yet it is significant to organizations and the benefits of it in relation to improving productivity and processes (Jon-Arild Johannessen, 2022).

Michael Polanyi is credited to have coined the term “tacit knowledge”. According to Polanyi (1966), our grasp of knowledge surpasses our capacity to articulate it. He argued that some knowledge cannot be expressed through language and that all knowledge is ultimately rooted in tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1966). Within an organizational context, the sharing of tacit knowledge is facilitated by a supportive culture. In a recent study by Kucharska and Rebelo (2022), the impact of tacit knowledge sharing on change adaptability and its subsequent effects on internal and external innovativeness were investigated. The findings indicate that tacit knowledge sharing and change adaptability, facilitated by a culture of learning, act as crucial intermediaries bridging transformational leadership and innovativeness. They also found that

leaders supporting a smooth flow of tacit knowledge sharing facilitate development through fostering external and internal adaptability and innovativeness (Kucharska & Rebelo, 2022).

Cox Iii et al. (2008) argue that tacit knowledge, which is based on personal experience and intuition, is essential in decision-making because it allows for judgment before a formal decision is made. They underscore that this judgment is not tied to a specific role or learned through explicit instruction, nor can it be delegated based on clear-cut rules. Instead, it arises organically from the interactions and practices within informal networks where knowledge is shared implicitly (Cox Iii et al., 2008, p. 151). Learning in organizations occurs at both the individual and collective levels. Specifically, knowledge shifts between tacit and explicit forms, and from individual to organizational knowledge. Organizational knowledge is categorized into two types: explicit and tacit. Tacit knowledge influences the sense-making capacity and constitutes the ability to understand critically. Sharing tacit knowledge involves learning and unlearning through experiences and the flow of knowledge. In organizations, knowledge progresses from individually acquired knowledge to organizationally acquired (learned) knowledge (Cox Iii et al., 2008, p. 152). When decision-makers use tacit knowledge, they engage in an automatic, unconscious process that relies on cognitive frameworks built from past experiences. Both organizations and their members possess unique histories, which shape their perceptions and judgments of the organization. The weakness of tacit knowledge is its invisibility; it reflects how individuals act without conscious awareness. Knowledge within an organization is mutable and fragile. Its value comes from its practical application, and it diminishes when separated from its useful context (Cox Iii et al., 2008, p. 153).

The sharing and learning of tacit knowledge depend on the individual who possesses it. Therefore, an organization's benefit is tied to how well individuals are facilitated to share their tacit knowledge, allowing it to become collective knowledge. This collective knowledge is learned and retained within the organization's 'memory' or 'collective mind.' Unlike individual knowledge, collective knowledge exists between individuals rather than within them. It can be either more or less than the sum of the individual knowledge components. Individuals may use their own tacit knowledge to improve their performance or draw on the tacit knowledge of

others. By sharing their own tacit knowledge and linking it with others, they can enhance overall performance (Gubbins & Dooley, 2021, p. 7).

Social interaction and relationships are crucial, and viewing them through the lens of social capital—particularly the relational elements of trust, norms, and social identification—is significant (Gubbins & Dooley, 2021, p. 9). Meta-analytic evidence indicates that effective knowledge transfer depends critically on trusting social relations (van Wijk, Jansen, & Lyles, 2008, as cited in Gubbins & Dooley, 2021, p. 9). Studies have shown that both affective and cognitive trust positively influence knowledge sharing at the dyadic and team levels (Chowdhury, 2005; Lee et al., 2010; Mooradian et al., 2006; Politis, 2003; Wu et al., 2007, as cited in Gubbins & Dooley, 2021, p. 9). Additionally, research has found that individuals tend to share less knowledge with those perceived as highly capable (ability) and more knowledge with those seen as honest, fair, and principled (integrity) (Bakker et al., 2006, as cited in Gubbins & Dooley, 2021, p. 10).

The finding of a survey studying the barriers to knowledge flow (Kakabadse et al., 2001, p. 148) identified four major categories of knowledge barriers: people, management, structure, and knowledge. People-related barriers include resistance to change, lack of time and discipline to learn, low motivation, high staff turnover, difficulty in transferring knowledge to new employees, and challenges in teaching new ideas to older staff. Management barriers involve the fear of relinquishing power, difficulties in delegating authority, challenging traditional company styles, imposed constraints, and a lack of understanding of formal approaches. Structural barriers consist of inflexible company structures, fragmented organizations, functional silos, and insufficient investment in systems. Knowledge-related barriers include challenges in extracting, categorizing, and rewarding knowledge, understanding knowledge management, facilitating sharing between key groups, and making knowledge widely accessible (Kakabadse et al., 2001, p. 148).

Kakabadse et al. (2001), building on earlier work by Kakabadse (1991), highlight the importance of high-quality dialogue among senior executives and other organizational members for both innovating and maturing organizations. Research on management competencies globally shows

that organizations benefit from openly addressing issues and concerns when the quality of dialogue is high and senior management relationships are positive (Kakabadse, 1991, 1993, 1996; Kakabadse and Myers, 1995, as cited in Kakabadse et al., 2001, p. 150). Conversely, in environments where relationships are strained and dialogue is limited, important issues often remain unaddressed to avoid discomfort among executives, leading to potential crises. Effective dialogue involves the transfer of knowledge through discussions about the organization's present and future, the quality of interpersonal relationships, external developments, and the perspectives of various internal actors and groups (Kakabadse et al., 2001, p. 150).

In the Øksnes municipality, the current practices and organizational factors are crucial to understanding how tacit knowledge is leveraged or impeded in the context of immigrant integration policy implementation and in turn how this affects the day-to-day experiences of frontline workers. Based on the aforementioned insights and conceptualization, my aim is to evaluate the state of knowledge sharing within the integration sector. I will investigate the levels of openness, trust, and collaboration in this context. Additionally, I will identify potential barriers that may hinder the effective exchange of information. These barriers could include individual resistance to change, management styles that impede knowledge flow, structural issues within the organization, and limitations posed by current knowledge management strategies.

I will evaluate how these barriers impact the day-to-day operations and decision-making processes of frontline workers. This includes understanding the practical implications of restricted knowledge flow and identifying areas where improvements are urgently needed. An exploration of the social interactions and trust levels within teams and across different departments will also be conducted to ascertain how these relational dynamics affect the sharing and utilization of tacit knowledge. Based on the findings, the study will propose interventions aimed at enhancing tacit knowledge sharing. The ultimate goal of these interventions will be to enhance overall organizational learning and effectiveness within the Øksnes municipality, ensuring that frontline workers have the necessary knowledge and support to perform optimally.

Coping Under Pressure

The concepts ‘coping’ or ‘coping mechanisms’ within the context of frontline policy implementation was presented by Michael Lipsky (1980) and further developed by scholars such as Tummers et al (2015). are relevant and suitable for my thesis, which can bring to light the various ways frontline workers cope with the challenges of policy implementation in smaller Norwegian municipalities like Øksnes. The strategies such as rationing services, modifying or diluting services, and using clients as resources provide a valuable lens through which to examine the responses of workers to the pressures and constraints of their environment.

Michael Lipsky (1980) provides a critical foundation for understanding how frontline workers in public service roles cope with their duties. Lipsky highlighted the common challenges these professionals face, such as overwhelming workloads, limited resources, and conflicting demands. According to Lipsky, all street-level bureaucrats potentially encounter situations that lead them to adopt coping mechanisms that deviate from the service ideal (p. xviii). He argues that the decisions made by street-level bureaucrats, the routines they establish, and the methods they create to manage uncertainties and work pressures effectively become the public policies they implement (Lipsky, 1980, p. xiii). Due to the necessity of exercising discretion while handling large workloads with inadequate resources, street-level bureaucrats must develop shortcuts and simplifications to manage the pressure of their responsibilities. These coping mechanisms are often not approved by the managers of their agencies (p. 18).

Building on the insights provided by Michael Lipsky, Lars L. C. Tummers, Victor Bekkers, Evelien Vink, and Michael Musheno (2015) continue this exploration in their seminal study. In this comprehensive work, the authors systematically review literature to categorize frontline workers' coping strategies into distinct “families”, highlighting the complex dynamics between service demands and the coping tactics of public servants (Tummers et al., 2015). In the following, I will first present an overview of the categorizations they have developed and then explain its relevance to my research.

In their systematic review, Tummers et al. (2015) analyzed 277 text fragments related to coping strategies during public service delivery, identifying nine coping mechanisms and three coping families (p. 1107). The largest number of coping instances pertain to the coping family "moving

towards clients" (43%). This suggests that frontline workers frequently adapt to clients' needs with the ultimate goal of assisting them. This behavior aligns with the concept of Public Service Motivation, indicating that frontline workers strive to provide meaningful public service, even under stressful conditions. The most frequently mentioned coping mechanism in this family is rule bending, where frontline workers modify rules to accommodate client demands. This behavior reflects a role conflict: the policy rules and requirements clash with clients' wishes and demands. To resolve this conflict, workers slightly adjust the rules to benefit the client (p. 1109).

Rule breaking is often mentioned as a coping mechanism. Unlike "rule bending," rule breaking deliberately defies the rules instead of working within them (p. 1109). The third coping strategy in this category is instrumental action, which involves developing long-term solutions to address stressful situations. Instrumental action is typically used when the stress is severe or persistent, allowing ample time to devise solutions (p. 1109). The fourth coping method in this family is prioritizing among clients. This occurs when there is a high workload and a shortage of resources, making it impossible to help everyone optimally. Prioritizing benefits certain clients or groups while others may receive less attention. Frontline workers may prioritize based on factors like a client's readiness (p. 1109). The final coping strategy is "using personal resources," where frontline workers go beyond their job descriptions to assist clients. This includes working overtime and even giving their own money, particularly when dealing with powerless and unemployed clients (p. 1110).

Although the coping family of "moving towards the clients" is frequently highlighted, Tummers et al. also identified numerous instances where frontline workers using coping strategies which constitute another family of coping mechanisms "moving away from clients" (38%). The most commonly mentioned method within this coping family is "routinizing," which involves dealing with clients in a standardized manner. Frontline workers aim to deliver a consistent standard of service to a large number of people within a short period (high workload), which often requires compromising the quality of the service (p. 1110). Another coping method in this category is rationing. In this approach, frontline workers make it more challenging for clients to access public services. Rationing is typically employed when there is high work pressure, and the frontline worker has significant control over the availability of services (p. 1110).

Tummers et al. identified that 19% of coping instances fell under the family of "moving against clients." The most frequently mentioned method in this family is "rigid rule following." Instead of bending or breaking rules, frontline workers often adhere strictly to them. This rigid adherence is typically used to control clients, especially those who are particularly demanding or manipulative. This coping mechanism appears to be associated with high workloads and a focus on efficiency (p. 1110). Another coping strategy identified during public service delivery is "aggression." Frontline workers frequently encounter aggression from clients and sometimes respond with aggression themselves. Additionally, studies have found that frontline workers sometimes become aggressive as a means of relieving their own frustrations (p. 1111).

The three coping "families" developed by Tummers et al (2015) can provide equipment for many levels of the research project. The three families of coping mechanism, namely "moving towards clients", "moving away from clients", and "moving against clients" not only help me explore the human dimension of policy implementation in Øksnes, but also helps me better organize the data I collect through the interviews, come up with follow up questions, and make better sense of the coping mechanism used by frontline workers. Tummers et al. (2015) identify "moving towards clients" as the largest category. Exploring this dimension within the scope of my research can be significant. This will enable me to understand the effects of these coping mechanisms on the actual policy being implemented on the ground, such as the impact on service delivery, the quality of interactions between frontline workers and clients, and the overall effectiveness of policy implementation in Øksnes. By delving into the "moving towards clients" category, I can gain insights into how frontline workers adopt strategies that prioritize client needs and foster positive engagement. This understanding can highlight best practices and potential areas for improvement in policy execution.

The second category, "moving away from clients," involves coping mechanisms where frontline workers distance themselves from clients to manage stress and workload. Investigating this category will help identify the circumstances under which workers disengage, the reasons behind their detachment, and the potential consequences for client satisfaction and policy outcomes.

This can also uncover systemic issues that may need addressing to support frontline workers better and reduce the need for such coping strategies.

Finally, "moving against clients" encompasses behaviors where frontline workers oppose or resist client demands as a coping mechanism. Analyzing this category will shed light on the adversarial interactions that may arise, the underlying causes of such conflicts, and their implications for policy implementation. Understanding these dynamics can inform the development of training and support systems aimed at reducing negative interactions and promoting a more collaborative approach between workers and clients.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to explore the experiences and perceptions of frontline workers engaged in immigrant integration in Øksnes municipality. Qualitative methods are particularly apt for this inquiry as they allow for an in-depth understanding of the complex human behaviors and the social contexts within which they occur (Bryman, 2016; Clark et al., 2021). Semi-structured interviews are chosen as the primary data collection tool due to their flexibility and effectiveness in eliciting detailed personal narratives and experiences (Smith, 2007). This approach effectively uncovers the detailed perspectives of frontline workers directly engaged in integration processes. It provides valuable, in-depth data that are crucial for understanding the nuances of their interactions with immigrants and how institutional practices influence their work. The qualitative interview technique facilitates not only the collection of data but also the interpretation of the phenomena studied from the perspectives of the participants themselves (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), thereby ensuring that the findings are grounded in the actual experiences of those at the forefront of immigrant integration in the community.

Data Collection

The participants for this study were selected from a group of frontline workers in Øksnes municipality, specifically those who have direct involvement in immigrant integration services. The criterion for selection was based on the participants' roles and experiences in facilitating integration initiatives, such as language training, cultural orientation programs, and employment assistance. Purposive sampling was employed to identify and recruit individuals who could provide profound insights into the integration process based on their direct interactions with immigrants. This method ensures that each participant has a rich experience relevant to the central questions of the research (Campbell et al., 2020).

For this study, a total of nine participants were chosen, encompassing a diverse range of job roles, such as language teacher, case handler, supervisor, consultant, contact person, volunteer,

and civil society representative, with experience levels ranging from newly appointed staff to seasoned professionals with over a decade in the field. The participants included five females and four males, with ages ranging from 29 to 68 years, providing a cross-section of generational perspectives within the workplace. Education levels among the group also varied, one with high school, but extended experience in integration, with all other participants holding at least a bachelor's degree. This variety in demographics allows the study to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences, enhancing the depth and breadth of the qualitative analysis. The details regarding individual participants are anonymized to maintain confidentiality and to adhere to ethical research practices.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face to foster a more personal connection and facilitate richer, more nuanced communication. Face-to-face setting allows for the observation of non-verbal cues and provides a more comfortable and engaging environment for the participants (Opdenakker, 2006; Qu & Dumay, 2011). Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes, providing ample time for participants to elaborate on their experiences and viewpoints. To accurately capture the information while respecting participant comfort and data integrity, only note-taking was employed during the sessions. This method was chosen to avoid the potential discomfort that audio recording might cause, thereby encouraging more open and honest communication. Detailed notes were taken to ensure that all significant points and nuances were recorded, which were later used to generate analysis. These methods collectively ensured a thorough and ethically responsible way of collecting qualitative data from frontline workers in Øksnes municipality.

The data collection for this study was conducted through semi-structured interviews, which were planned to ensure comprehensive coverage of the topics relevant to immigrant integration practices. It is recommended that the interview guide is initially developed based on a review of the literature in the field (Anne Galletta, 2013), which in this case was reviewing of immigration studies. The guide comprised mainly open-ended questions to encourage participants to express their thoughts and experiences freely, thus providing deeper insights into their roles and the dynamics of their work. Probing questions are important to elicit more detailed responses where necessary, ensuring clarity and depth in the topics discussed (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021; Anne Galletta, 2013). After conducting each interview, I reviewed my notes, adding personal

reflections and making adjustments to the interview guide to enhance its suitability for capturing the desired information.

To ensure the collection of correct and relevant data during the interviews, it is important to employ several techniques: Active listening was crucial, involving full attention to the interviewee, acknowledging and reflecting on their responses to show their input was valued (Keegan, 2009). I used probing questions to delve deeper into unclear or incomplete responses, which were open-ended to encourage more detailed explanations. Clarification and paraphrasing were employed to confirm understanding, asking interviewees to confirm my interpretations. Follow-up questions based on their responses helped explore topics more deeply and cover relevant areas that emerged during the conversation. Note-taking was essential for capturing details for later reference. I encouraged interviewees to provide specific examples to better illustrate their points. Attention to non-verbal cues like body language and tone offered additional insights. I ensured the interviewee's comfort and controlled the pace for more thoughtful responses. Finally, I summarized key points at the end of discussions to verify understanding and allow for any final adjustments or additions by the interviewee.

Data Analysis

The data collected through semi-structured interviews was analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely used method in qualitative research for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Hole, 2023). Thematic analysis provides a flexible approach that supports a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data. As suggested by Saunders et al. (2023), I began the process with taking detailed notes during the interviews, which were later enhanced with additional reflections and observations. As advised, the analysis phase involved thoroughly reading and re-reading these notes, during which preliminary coding ideas were identified. In the coding process, I distilled the text into concise descriptors, typically one to three words, that encapsulated the essence of the core concepts, following the methodology recommended by Saunders et al. (2023). This was done manually to stay close to the data and to refine the understanding of each response in its context. Following the coding phase, codes were grouped into potential themes that accurately reflect the core issues in the data set. These themes were

then reviewed and refined to ensure they relate back to the coded extracts and the entire data set, forming a coherent pattern (Saunders et al., 2023).

The final stage involved defining and naming the themes. In this stage, I adopted several key practices recommended by Braun and Clarke (2019). As advised, I defined and documented the theoretical underpinnings of my study. By explicitly linking theory to method, I aimed to enhance the coherence and relevance of my findings. Braun and Clarke (2019) also underscore the significance of reflexive practice. In my analysis this meant regularly revisiting and scrutinizing my assumptions, biases, and the influence of my own positionality on the research. For instance, after each interview and during the coding process, I documented reflexive notes that questioned my initial interpretations. This practice was critical in striving for objectivity and in mitigating researcher bias (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Operationalization of Concepts

In operationalizing discretion among frontline workers, the qualitative data from interviews provided evidence of how these workers exercise judgment and adapt their practices to the unique circumstances of individual refugees. The evidence indicated that workers often interpreted and adjusted standard procedures, tailoring their actions to better fit the needs of each refugee they encountered. This discretionary behavior was evident in their adaptation of policies, such as choosing informal settings for interactions instead of formal offices. This choice facilitated more open and effective communication, allowing refugees to express their needs and concerns more freely. Additionally, flexibility in procedures and regulations allowed workers to make situationally sensitive adjustments in service delivery. For instance, they extended enrollment periods in integration programs to accommodate individual situations, demonstrating a high degree of autonomy and responsiveness in their roles. These indicators—adapting policies, choosing informal settings, and flexibility in regulations—were used to operationalize the concept of discretion, showing that frontline workers play a crucial role in bridging the gap between rigid policies and the complex realities faced by refugees.

The study of coping mechanisms revealed various strategies employed by frontline workers to manage the emotional and professional challenges of their roles. Key behaviors identified through the analysis of interview data included forming networks for resource and information sharing across sectors, practicing emotional management, and setting personal boundaries. The evidence indicated that these workers relied on informal support systems, such as private conversations with colleagues, to provide emotional support and stress relief. They also emphasized the importance of maintaining clear boundaries to prevent role overload and burnout, distinguishing their professional responsibilities from their personal lives. Capacity building and continuous learning emerged as proactive strategies, empowering workers to handle the complexities of their roles and adapt to changing conditions. Identifying indicators such as networks for resource sharing, emotional management, personal boundaries, and continuous learning, I used them to operationalize coping mechanisms. They highlighted how frontline workers sustain their well-being and effectiveness in a demanding and emotionally charged environment.

In examining policy alienation, the interviews revealed workers' perceptions of their influence over and engagement with policies. The evidence pointed to feelings of powerlessness, as many workers felt they lacked the ability to impact policy decisions. This sense of powerlessness was coupled with feelings of meaninglessness, with workers expressing that the policies in place often did not align with the actual needs of refugees or seemed illogical. Despite existing feedback mechanisms, workers felt that their input to policy making was limited, furthering their sense of alienation. To operationalize policy alienation, the indicators—feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, and lack of input to policy—were used to capture the workers' disconnection from policy-making processes. The evidence underscored a significant gap between frontline experiences and policy frameworks, contributing to a sense of disengagement and frustration among workers.

When exploring inertia, the focus was on identifying factors contributing to organizational inefficiencies. The evidence showed that ambiguous job roles led to uncertainty and inefficiencies, as workers were often unclear about their responsibilities. The organization's resistance to change emerged as a significant barrier, slowing down the adaptation of services to

meet refugees' needs and revealing a rigid structure. High staff turnover rates and inadequate strategic responses disrupted service continuity, further highlighting inefficiencies. Limited inter-departmental collaboration also undermined cohesive service delivery, leading to fragmented experiences for refugees during integration. These indicators that were used to operationalize inertia were: ambiguous job roles, resistance to change, high turnover rates, and limited collaboration. The evidence illustrated how structural and procedural rigidity within the organization hindered its ability to effectively respond to the dynamic needs of refugee integration.

Finally, in examining knowledge sharing, the study identified indicators that captured both formal and informal mechanisms within the organization. Tacit knowledge, particularly in interpreting cultural nuances, played a crucial role in effective service delivery. Informal exchanges, such as casual conversations among colleagues, significantly facilitated the transfer of experiential and contextual knowledge. The physical proximity of departments enhanced accessibility and ease of sharing insights, promoting a culture of knowledge exchange. Joint projects, although limited, demonstrated structured collaboration as a means of sharing resources and expertise. Social capital and trust, evaluated through interpersonal relationships, influenced the extent and effectiveness of knowledge sharing. Informal networks and alliances allowed for rapid dissemination and adaptation of knowledge across traditional boundaries. These indicators—knowledge sharing, informal exchanges, physical proximity, joint projects, and social capital—were used to operationalize tacit knowledge sharing. The evidence highlighted the importance of both formal and informal channels in fostering a collaborative and informed working environment among frontline workers.

In summary, the operationalization of concepts such as discretion, coping mechanisms, policy alienation, inertia, and knowledge sharing was grounded in specific pieces of evidence gathered through interviews with frontline workers. Each concept was defined and measured using indicators derived from the workers' experiences and practices, providing a comprehensive understanding of how these concepts manifest in the context of refugee integration. The evidence not only validated the operationalization process but also offered insights into the complexities and dynamics of frontline work in this critical area.

Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Ensuring ethical integrity is paramount in conducting qualitative research, especially when dealing with personal and potentially sensitive information. I adhered in this project to the ethical guidelines and regulations set forth by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (Sikt). Prior to any data collection, I submitted the research proposal for review and received approval from the Sikt ethical review board, confirming compliance with national standards for ethical research (*Notification Form for Personal Data* | Sikt, n.d.).

A critical component of the research process was informed consent; all participants were fully informed about the study's aims, the nature of their participation, their rights to withdraw at any time, and the measures taken to ensure their confidentiality and anonymity. I conducted interviews only after participants explicitly agreed to take part and signed the consent form. Informed consent is a crucial ethical consideration in research involving human subjects, ensuring the protection of their rights and well-being (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001). It involves providing potential participants with comprehensive information about the study, including its purpose, methods, risks, and benefits, and obtaining their voluntary consent to participate (Emanuel et al., 2000).

To address potential biases and assumptions, I maintained a reflexive journal throughout the research process. This journal was used to document my reflections on my interactions with the study participants, the data collection process, and my own responses to the data as it was analyzed. By critically examining my preconceptions and the impact these may have on the study, I aimed to mitigate bias and enhance the interpretative validity of the findings. This reflexive practice is essential in qualitative research (Ortlipp, 2008) as it helps to make the research process transparent and ensures that the findings are a truthful representation of the data collected.

The use of a reflexive journal to address potential biases and assumptions in qualitative research is part of a broader discussion on the importance of reflexivity in social science research. Reflexivity involves researchers critically examining their own beliefs, values, and experiences and how these may influence the research process and findings (Finlay & Gough, 2008). This is particularly important in qualitative research, where the researcher is often closely involved with the participants and the data, and where there is a risk of bias or misinterpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Finlay & Gough, 2008).

By maintaining a reflexive journal, I could document my thoughts and feelings throughout the research process, including my interactions with participants, the data collection process, and my responses to the data. This process helps researchers to identify and challenge their assumptions and biases, and to develop a more nuanced and informed understanding of the data (Malterud, 2001).

Despite the rigorous methodological design of this study, there are inherent limitations that need to be acknowledged. One of the primary challenges is related to the relatively small sample size, which is typical in qualitative research but can limit the generalizability of the findings (Dworkin, 2012). With only nine participants, the experiences and insights gathered may not fully represent all frontline workers involved in immigrant integration in Øksnes municipality. Additionally, research is susceptible to researcher bias, where the researcher's perspectives and interpretations can unduly influence the analysis and conclusions drawn from the data (Chapman, 2014).

These limitations might influence my interpretation of the data, potentially skewing my understanding of the integration processes by reflecting only a narrow range of experiences. To counteract these effects, I am incorporating transparency into my research process. This involves engaging in reflexive practices, which enable me to critically examine the methodologies and decision-making pathways I use throughout my research. Such practices help me maintain objectivity by acknowledging and addressing any potential biases that may affect my study's conclusions. By being transparent about my research methods and reflective about my own

influence on the data, I aim to enhance the credibility and reliability of my findings, ensuring that my interpretations of the integration processes are as accurate and unbiased as possible.

My Own Reflections

As the interviewer, I found the interview process to be an informative experience that yielded rich and insightful data. The shared experience of being a former refugee from Afghanistan created a strong bond of trust and relatability between myself and the interviewees. This common ground allowed us to engage in open and honest conversations, where interviewees felt comfortable sharing their thoughts, experiences, and challenges without hesitation.

The emphasis on the injustice of different rules and regulations for different groups of refugees is an issue that warrants further exploration. While my status as a former refugee may have influenced the interviewees' perceptions and responses, it is difficult to definitively establish a causal relationship. Nonetheless, the interviewees' heartfelt accounts and frustrations highlighted the urgent need to address the inequities faced by refugees in the integration process.

One of the most rewarding aspects of the interview process was the opportunity to provide interviewees with a space for reflection. Many of the interviewees held stressful and chaotic day-to-day jobs that left little time for introspection. By asking open-ended questions, listening attentively, and creating a supportive environment, I sought to facilitate a reflective process that allowed interviewees to gain new perspectives on their work and their lives. This process was often cathartic for the interviewees, as it gave them the chance to process their experiences and emotions in a safe and supportive setting.

The interview process was a powerful and meaningful experience that provided valuable insights into the challenges faced by refugees during the integration process. The trust established between myself and the interviewees, the opportunity for reflection, and the positive impact on the interviewees all contributed to the richness and significance of the data collected. This data will serve as a foundation for further research and advocacy efforts aimed at improving the lives of refugees and ensuring a more just and equitable society for all.

Findings

Frontline Flexibility: The Role of Discretion

The integration of refugees into host societies, such as observed in Øksnes municipality, presents an intricate web of challenges that frontline workers encounter and attempt to navigate on a daily basis. These municipal workers hold a pivotal role in the implementation of public policies, in accordance with street-level bureaucracy theory. They are responsible for providing essential services to refugees, such as housing, education, and healthcare, while also ensuring that these individuals are able to integrate into the local community.

The challenges faced by frontline workers are multifaceted and constantly evolving. One significant challenge is the ever-changing demography of the refugee population. The number of refugees arriving in Øksnes municipality has fluctuated over the years, and the workers must be able to adapt to the changing needs of this population. Additionally, the workers often have to deal with a lack of experienced and qualified personnel, which can make it difficult to provide adequate services to refugees. The dynamic and diverse nature of the refugee population in Øksnes, coupled with the shortage of experienced personnel, necessitates a high degree of discretion among frontline workers. They often encounter situations that are not covered by standard protocols or procedures, requiring them to make judgment calls based on their understanding of the individual refugee's needs and the specific context.

One way to measure a frontline worker's discretion is their ability to interpret written policies, rules, and regulations in a manner consistent with the overall goals and objectives of the national integration policies. This involves identifying areas where the rules may be ambiguous or incomplete and making reasonable decisions based on their understanding of the situation. In Øksnes municipality, frontline workers have limited exposure to policy documents directly, mainly due to workload. My observations and interview data reveal that these workers primarily receive policy updates through various indirect means, such as staff meetings, discussions with colleagues, online seminars, and news broadcasts. Despite these channels, the heavy workload

and time constraints they face often limit their understanding of the broader policy contexts. Consequently, frontline workers tend to focus on updates that have an immediate impact on their daily responsibilities.

My interviews reveal that frontline workers working in the integration sector in Øksnes are so caught up in the daily tasks that arise in their day-to-day work that they often have no time to reflect on or make sense of the larger organizational and regulatory contexts in which they operate. This lack of reflection can lead to a limited understanding of the broader policy goals and objectives and it prevents them from having an informed understanding of how the integration sector in Øksnes is organized and how to make use of the existing opportunities in this municipality. This could mean that their exercise of discretion is influenced by the input from their immediate colleagues, their own intuition, and the immediate circumstances of their interactions with their clients.

Frontline workers are often faced with the difficult task of prioritizing which refugees to help and what sort of help to provide them. They are aware that the demand for assistance from their clients is greater than what they can possibly provide, and that dedicating time to one case may result in another being put on hold. As one participant put it, “we cannot turn the hose to the place that is not burning.” This requires them to make judgment calls based on various factors, such as the urgency of the situation, the individual's level of vulnerability, and the likelihood of a successful integration outcome. Frontline workers must strike a delicate balance between providing immediate support to those in acute need and ensuring that all refugees receive the necessary assistance over time. Their ability to exercise discretion in this regard is crucial for maximizing the impact of their efforts and promoting equitable access to services for refugees.

Frontline workers also possess discretion in determining the manner and location of their interactions with clients. One participant highlighted that calling clients to the office for meetings might not be the most effective way to engage with them. Instead, they suggested meeting clients in informal settings, such as their residence or during shared activities. “They open up when, for example, we make food together,” they said. This approach, they explained, creates a more relaxed and comfortable environment, allowing clients to open up and share their concerns more

freely. By adapting their communication style and choosing appropriate settings, frontline workers can build stronger relationships with clients and provide more personalized and effective support.

Frontline workers exercise discretion in deciding when to strictly follow procedures and regulations. As one interviewee stated, their focus is on the effect and final result. If they can, they may go over routines that are not working and change them. They said, “I am not just procedure-oriented. To me the most important thing is the effect, the final result. If some routines are not working, I can go over them, and change them. But it is a lot of work, you know.” This highlights their pragmatic approach in dealing with bureaucratic constraints, emphasizing outcomes over rigid adherence to procedures, and is driven by the need to effectively meet the complex needs of refugees within the constraints of their roles.

Frontline workers often find themselves navigating complex situations where the cultural and religious values of immigrant families clash with established norms or requirements. For instance, when Muslim schoolgirls are not allowed to participate in swimming lessons due to religious modesty concerns, frontline workers exercise discretion in finding culturally sensitive solutions. They may collaborate with families to explore alternative arrangements, such as allowing the use of full-body swimsuits. This kind of flexibility underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity and the need for tailored solutions to ensure effective integration, balancing the requirements of local regulations with the cultural needs of refugees.

It was highlighted that several policies and regulations are failing to effectively serve the interests of refugees. A major concern is the systemic non-recognition of the qualifications and professional experiences that refugees bring from their home countries. A participant said that a Ukrainian refugee with 15 years of truck driving experience is unable to continue his profession in Norway due to stringent credential recognition issues. This barrier not only prevents refugees from working in their trained fields but also fosters a sense of frustration and helplessness among those eager to contribute to their new society. Frontline workers, bound by these rigid regulations, have virtually no discretionary authority to address or bypass these rules, limiting their ability to fully support the integration process.

It was mentioned that policy frameworks often impose unrealistic timelines for refugees to achieve language proficiency and employment, typically ranging from three months to a year. These expectations overlook the complex challenges refugees face, including trauma, cultural adjustment, and the need to adapt to a new environment. Such rigid timelines create undue pressure, potentially hindering integration and setting refugees up for failure. While frontline workers have some discretion in extending language training, they often feel compelled to prioritize rapid job placement, even if refugees are not adequately prepared after a year. This pressure is a direct result of policy constraints that do not fully account for the individualized needs of refugees.

Specific demographic groups among the refugees are particularly disadvantaged under the current policies. For example, Ukrainian refugees who are over the age of 55 or those who are physically or otherwise unable to participate in mandatory integration programs find themselves inadequately supported. The policy frameworks do not comprehensively address the unique needs of these groups, and as a result, they do not receive sufficient resources or targeted assistance. This lack of support leaves older refugees and those with special needs in a vulnerable position. The burden of supporting these individuals often falls on local municipalities and frontline workers, who find themselves addressing these gaps without adequate guidance or resources from higher levels. This underscores the need for more inclusive policy frameworks that consider the diverse needs of the refugee population.

One significant indicator of discretion in public service is the authority granted to frontline workers to make decisions in situations not explicitly covered by written rules. This discretion allows these workers to apply their judgment and experience to determine the best course of action based on specific circumstances. It acknowledges that rigid adherence to policy cannot always account for the complex and varied realities faced by individuals, especially in the context of refugee support. For example, municipalities are mandated to enroll newly arrived refugees into the introduction program within a three-month timeframe. However, the flexibility afforded to frontline workers allows them to adjust this period based on individual needs and circumstances, ensuring a more tailored and effective integration process.

Discretion extends to how services are provided within the frameworks set by the law. For instance, the law requires municipalities to offer language assistance to refugee children, but it does not specify the exact amount of support that should be provided. This lack of specificity allows frontline workers to assess the needs of the children and determine an appropriate level of support. As one interviewee highlighted, their municipality decided to allocate five hours of language assistance per week. This decision reflects the frontline workers' understanding of the children's needs and their commitment to providing adequate support to facilitate their integration into the educational system, demonstrating the critical role of frontline discretion in effective service provision.

Frontline workers have the ability to exercise discretion by taking actions that are not explicitly outlined in written rules. This includes addressing unforeseen circumstances and finding innovative solutions to problems. For example, language assistance providers to refugee school children may find themselves providing assistance to the families of the children, particularly when they are newly arrived and the adults have not yet begun the introductory program. This flexibility in service provision allows frontline workers to adapt to the evolving needs of refugees, ensuring that they receive comprehensive support during the initial stages of their integration process.

While clear policies may dictate eligibility for integration services, frontline workers often interpret these criteria with a degree of flexibility. They consider various factors such as extenuating circumstances surrounding a refugee's situation, evidence of a strong commitment to integration, or a refugee's demonstrated potential to contribute positively to the local community. This latitude in decision-making reflects a broader desire among workers to personalize services to ensure the best possible outcomes for the refugees they support, demonstrating both empathy and a commitment to effective solution-finding. This approach is essential in addressing the unique and complex needs of each refugee, promoting a more inclusive and supportive integration process.

Feeling the Disconnect

Interviews with frontline workers reveal a significant level of 'policy alienation,' characterized by their experiences of powerlessness, meaninglessness, and estrangement from the policies they are tasked with implementing. Evidence of policy alienation is particularly pronounced in the feelings of powerlessness described by many participants. They perceive an inability to influence policy decisions that directly impact their daily work and the well-being of the refugees they assist. For example, one participant mentioned, "it gives me an opportunity to give feedback to them and make suggestions. But sometimes I hear from them that 'you are making things complicated.'" This quote encapsulates a recurring theme where workers feel their insights and suggestions are dismissed or seen as obstructive rather than constructive. Despite being on the frontline and having firsthand knowledge of the challenges and needs of refugees, workers often feel that their feedback does not lead to meaningful policy changes. This sense of powerlessness is exacerbated by the hierarchical nature of decision-making processes within the municipality, where frontline workers typically lack regular access to those in authority who can enact changes. Their experiences and observations are filtered through multiple layers of bureaucracy, diluting their impact and leading to policies designed and implemented without fully considering the practical realities faced by these workers.

The structure of feedback mechanisms is often informal and ad hoc, contributing further to workers' sense of frustration. While their daily decision-making experiences might occasionally reach decision-makers, these opportunities are sporadic and unstructured. As a result, frontline workers often feel their professional expertise and daily experiences are undervalued, leading to persistent disengagement. This perceived undervaluation has broader implications for the efficacy of refugee integration efforts. When frontline workers feel alienated from the policies they are meant to implement, it leads to a lack of motivation and commitment, which negatively affects the quality of services provided to refugees. Additionally, workers expressed a sense of meaninglessness, indicating they often do not understand the rationale behind certain policies and do not perceive these policies as effectively addressing the real needs of refugees. This gap between the objectives of integration policy and bureaucratic rules hinders effective policy implementation and negatively affects workers' professional satisfaction and motivation.

The disconnect between policy objectives and bureaucratic rules creates significant frustration for both workers and refugees. For instance, while policy might aim to integrate refugees into the workforce quickly, bureaucratic hurdles, such as not recognizing foreign qualifications, prevent this from happening. This gap between policy goals and practical implementation results in frustration for workers who see the potential and readiness of refugees to contribute to society but are hampered by policies creating barriers rather than pathways to integration. This sense of meaninglessness impacts workers' professional satisfaction and motivation. When they see their efforts stymied by inflexible policies, it can lead to a sense of futility. Workers invest time and effort in helping refugees navigate these systems, only to encounter obstacles that seem arbitrary and counterproductive. This misalignment not only demotivates workers but also affects the overall effectiveness of refugee integration efforts.

One prominent example of this mismatch is the assumption that refugees would only stay in the region temporarily, conflicting with the reality that many refugees intend to settle permanently in Øksnes municipality. This assumption creates a significant gap in service provision, as workers, expecting to provide short-term assistance, find themselves unprepared and unequipped to support refugees in their long-term integration. This includes helping them find permanent housing, long-term employment, or educational opportunities for their children. The context in which frontline workers operate is thus crucial in shaping their experiences of policy alienation. The bureaucratic environment, the nature of feedback mechanisms, and the disconnect between policy objectives and practical realities all play a significant role in how these workers perceive their roles and effectiveness. The context of their work, characterized by hierarchical decision-making and inflexible policies, plays a pivotal role in exacerbating their feelings of powerlessness and meaninglessness, ultimately affecting their motivation and the quality of services provided to refugees.

Ambiguity and Resistance to Change

In my study, I identified significant institutional inertia, which was prominently demonstrated by a lack of well-defined roles and an organizational system resistant to change. This inertia

significantly impacted the frontline workers, hindering their ability to provide flexible and adaptable services necessary to address the rapidly changing needs of refugees. Despite their best efforts, the workers were constrained by the rigid organizational structure, which led to inefficiencies and confusion. For example, the lack of a clear framework for distributing responsibilities within municipalities often resulted in disagreements among various actors, such as departments, divisions, and teams, regarding who was ultimately accountable for certain tasks or projects. This confusion and inefficiency were exacerbated by the complex and multifaceted nature of municipal operations, which involve a wide range of services and functions. As a result, the frontline workers, acting within a context of shifting legislative, policy, and priority landscapes, found it challenging to navigate their roles and responsibilities effectively. Their behavior was largely a response to the ambiguity and lack of direction, leading to frustration and a sense of dissatisfaction as their valuable contributions and suggestions often failed to reach the leadership and bring about meaningful change.

The impact of this institutional inertia was further compounded by the highly dynamic environment in which integration efforts occur. The number of refugees arriving in Norway fluctuates significantly from year to year, influenced by various global and regional factors, and the cultural backgrounds of incoming refugees continuously shift, bringing diverse and unique integration challenges. Frontline workers, therefore, had to operate within an ever-changing context, where the existing job descriptions, responsibilities, and organizational frameworks, which may have been effective in one period, quickly became inadequate in another due to the changing circumstances. The evolving attitudes and policies of public and political leaders also played a significant role, as they could shift integration strategies and priorities. This lack of structural and institutional flexibility and responsiveness significantly hindered the workers' ability to adapt to new challenges and deliver effective services. The frontline workers, aware of the gaps and inconsistencies, often tried to adapt by creating informal networks and finding ad-hoc solutions, but these efforts were not sufficient to overcome the systemic barriers they faced.

The consequences of unclear responsibility distribution within municipalities were significant and multifaceted. The absence of a clear framework led to delays, inefficiencies, and duplication

of efforts, as different actors often worked on the same tasks without proper coordination. This lack of clarity also resulted in missed opportunities, unfulfilled commitments, and decreased accountability, making it difficult to pinpoint who was ultimately responsible for certain outcomes. For instance, during interviews, numerous instances were highlighted where different departments had conflicting interpretations or expectations about their roles and responsibilities, leading to potential conflicts and inefficiencies. The evolving landscape of local government, with changes in legislation, policies, and priorities over time, only added to this uncertainty and need for adjustments. The frontline workers, acting within this complex and evolving context, often experienced a sense of frustration and dissatisfaction. They felt uncertain about their roles and lacked the necessary direction and support to perform their duties effectively, which was reflected in their behavior as they struggled to find clarity and coordination in their work.

Recruiting and retaining qualified employees posed a substantial challenge, adding another layer of complexity to the situation. The steep learning curve for newcomers, due to the unique requirements of the job, made it difficult for them to become fully functional quickly. New employees needed to master not only the technical aspects of the role but also develop a deep understanding of different cultures, create networks, and become familiar with bureaucratic systems. This process typically took at least six months to a year, and the high turnover rate among new employees created a significant burden on the organization. For example, when an employee left after a short period, it created a knowledge gap and disrupted the workflow, leading to delays in projects, decreased productivity, and increased stress for remaining employees. The leadership of the municipality had yet to address this ongoing problem and develop effective strategies to attract and retain qualified employees. The frontline workers, dealing with the consequences of high turnover and the resulting disruptions, behaved in ways that reflected their attempts to manage the increased workload and stress, often feeling overburdened and undervalued.

The persistent issue of suboptimal cooperation between the municipality's departments further exacerbated the situation. Structural and institutional shortcomings hindered effective collaboration and service delivery, as employees often got bogged down in tasks they perceived as another department's responsibility. Despite understanding the root causes of the disconnect

and offering solutions to address them, there was a prevailing sentiment among the workers that their valuable suggestions seldom reached the leadership, and meaningful changes were rarely implemented. This disconnect created a fragmented and inefficient work environment, where each department operated in silos, leading to duplication of efforts, miscommunication, and delays in service delivery. The context in which the frontline workers were acting was one of structural inefficiency and lack of effective communication, which played a significant role in shaping their behavior. Their morale suffered as they felt their contributions were undervalued and their expertise underutilized, leading to a sense of frustration and disengagement. This environment hindered the municipality's ability to meet the community's needs effectively, as the lack of cohesive action and support from the leadership prevented the implementation of effective and responsive integration strategies.

Knowledge Flow

The research reveals significant challenges in the sharing of tacit knowledge among frontline workers dealing with immigration integration, highlighting the profound implications of these obstacles. Workers often depend on their deep, tacit understanding of cultural nuances and non-verbal cues to enhance interactions with immigrants. This reliance reflects Polanyi's concept that "we know more than we can tell," as much of their effective communication strategies are developed through personal experience and informal exchanges with colleagues, rather than formal documentation. High staff turnover disrupts the continuity of knowledge transfer, affecting the retention of these crucial, experience-based insights. This turnover challenges the consistency of service provided to immigrants, as new staff may lack the nuanced understanding necessary for effective integration. Moreover, the resistance to change exhibited by higher management members further impedes the adoption of innovative practices needed to improve integration processes. This resistance often stems from a comfort with established routines and apprehension toward untested methods, which may seem riskier or less reliable to more experienced employees.

In the context of fragmented departments, the organization faces additional structural issues that complicate the scenario. The siloed operations resulting from these fragmented departments

hinder the maintenance of a cohesive strategy across the entire organization involved in immigration policies. This fragmentation leads to inconsistent application of policies and a lack of a unified approach, which could otherwise streamline processes and enhance efficiency. Insufficient investment in robust systems for knowledge management exacerbates these challenges, making the capture and sharing of valuable tacit knowledge sporadic and unsystematic. The lack of appropriate systems means that knowledge sharing heavily relies on personal initiative rather than structured organizational practices. This gap not only hinders the flow of knowledge but also limits the potential for this knowledge to be formally recognized, analyzed, and integrated into broader organizational learning processes.

Physical proximity between departments plays a crucial role in fostering better knowledge sharing and collaboration. Interviewees emphasized that when partner agencies are located close to each other, there is a stronger sense of connection and awareness of each other's daily activities. This proximity facilitates informal interactions, such as impromptu meetings, hallway conversations, and lunch gatherings, leading to the exchange of ideas, problem-solving, and the building of trust. Conversely, when agencies are located far apart, collaboration becomes more challenging. Interviewees noted that physical distance leads to a lack of visibility into each other's work and a decreased sense of shared purpose, resulting in miscommunication, misunderstandings, and a lack of coordination. This distance can create a sense of isolation and competition rather than collaboration. The lack of joint projects with equal ownership between agencies indicates a significant opportunity for improvement in terms of collaboration and knowledge sharing.

The critical role of social capital and trust in facilitating effective knowledge sharing is significant, as noted by frontline workers who emphasize the importance of building trust and fostering strong interpersonal relationships within their teams and with the immigrant groups they serve. Trust functions as a pivotal enabler for the exchange of tacit knowledge, including cultural understandings, personal insights, and sensitive information that immigrants might otherwise be reluctant to share. However, the rigidity of formal work-focused meetings between representatives of partner agencies hinders the development of personal connections that facilitate knowledge sharing. Casual conversations over coffee or during breaks at conferences

allow individuals to connect on a more personal level, fostering a sense of camaraderie and understanding. These informal interactions are crucial for building trust and rapport, creating a foundation for open communication and knowledge exchange that ultimately leads to better collaboration and improved outcomes.

In Øksnes, the effective implementation of immigration integration policies heavily relies on the principle of multi-actor collaboration, as evidenced by the frontline workers' experiences. These workers stress the importance of engaging with a variety of local stakeholders, including NGOs, educational institutions, and community leaders, to craft solutions that are not only innovative but also deeply attuned to the specific needs and contexts of the immigrant populations they serve. This collaborative approach is particularly beneficial in addressing complex social issues that require a nuanced understanding of cultural, educational, and socio-economic factors. By working with a diverse range of actors, frontline workers can leverage a broader spectrum of insights and resources, enhancing the effectiveness and responsiveness of their integration strategies.

Frontline workers highlight the significant role played by informal networks and alliances outside traditional bureaucratic frameworks. These informal interactions often lead to quicker adaptation of policies and practices, as they allow for the rapid sharing of insights and on-the-ground experiences that might not be formally documented. Such networks act as crucial conduits for innovation, offering a platform for spontaneous idea exchange and creative problem-solving that formal structures might stifle. However, the quality of dialogue among frontline workers and between different levels of the organizational hierarchy significantly affects the effectiveness of immigration integration policy. High-quality dialogue involves open and constructive exchanges that not only address current practices but also explore potential improvements and innovations. In Øksnes, this form of dialogue is notably lacking, particularly among senior executives and frontline workers. This deficiency leads to critical issues remaining unaddressed and opportunities for innovation being lost. The absence of effective communication results in a siloed approach, where departments do not share insights or learn from each other's experiences, further hampering the organization's ability to adapt to new challenges or changes in the policy environment. To rectify this, fostering an environment where

trust and openness are prioritized is crucial, enabling all members to feel valued and heard, thereby enhancing strategic dialogue and contributing to more successful policy outcomes.

Adapting and Coping

In the examination of refugee integration practices in Øksnes municipality, frontline workers employed various coping mechanisms to manage the challenges inherent in their roles. Evidence of these mechanisms surfaced through the intricate and emotionally charged process of facilitating refugee integration. Workers emphasized the importance of adaptive strategies to cope with the unpredictability and frequent changes in policies inherent to their professions. One key coping mechanism was the establishment of networks among workers from various sectors, including other municipal departments, community-based actors, private sector participants, and civil society. These networks were crucial for sharing information and resources and providing valuable learning opportunities from peers, which were essential for managing daily job stresses. However, time constraints and organizational barriers often limited their opportunities to build such cross-sectoral networks, hindering effective collaboration outside their immediate circles. The need for better-structured support systems to foster intersectoral communication and cooperation was evident, underscoring the complexities faced by frontline workers as they navigated their roles.

The constant emotional demands of frontline work necessitated a significant focus on emotional management, or "emotional labor," as described by Peters (2019). Frontline workers often interacted with traumatized and emotionally unstable refugees, requiring them to maintain a positive and supportive demeanor while offering psychological assistance. This required a delicate balance, as workers had to empathize and provide support without becoming overwhelmed or emotionally drained. Workers adopted different strategies, sometimes moving towards clients by acting as friends or therapists, listening with empathy, and at other times moving away by adhering strictly to their job descriptions to avoid emotional overload. This behavior was crucial for maintaining their emotional health and effectiveness. The emotional labor involved in dealing with policy ambiguity and unclear role definitions further complicated

their roles, often leading to frustration and confusion. Yet, exhibiting patience and professionalism was essential for effective client interaction in such circumstances.

Frontline workers often sought solace in private and informal conversations with colleagues to cope with the emotional demands of their work. These conversations served as crucial safe spaces where workers could vent their stress, share experiences, and seek advice from those who understood their challenges. These interactions were essential for personal emotional relief and contributed to sustaining professional effectiveness in challenging circumstances. Engaging in emotional management helped frontline workers develop resilience and adaptability, fostering a sense of community and mutual support among colleagues. Recognizing and addressing the emotional demands of frontline work was crucial for organizations to ensure the long-term sustainability and success of their workforce, highlighting the importance of creating supportive environments for these workers.

The diverse tasks frontline workers undertook, such as providing translation services, assisting with legal paperwork, offering emotional support, and navigating healthcare systems, underscored their adaptability and responsiveness to refugees' wide-ranging needs. However, the constant shifting of responsibilities often led to role ambiguity, leaving workers unsure of what was expected of them. To counteract these challenges, frontline workers recognized the need for clear personal boundaries. They understood that attempting to address all the complex needs of their clients single-handedly was unrealistic and could lead to role overload and burnout. By setting boundaries, workers could focus on areas where they could make the most significant impact, ensuring effective support for refugees while preventing compassion fatigue. This approach was crucial for maintaining their well-being and creating a sustainable foundation for providing ongoing, high-quality care.

Participants in the study viewed capacity building as a crucial strategy for empowering frontline workers to cope with daily challenges. Continuous professional development and targeted training programs were essential for enhancing skills necessary for effective refugee integration. Practical abilities, such as training in registration procedures and basic needs assessment, were fundamental for efficient service delivery. Additionally, cultural competence and conflict

resolution skills were equally important due to the diverse cultural backgrounds of refugees. Cultural competence training equipped workers with the knowledge and skills to interact effectively and sensitively, reducing the risk of misunderstandings and conflicts. Formal training programs, alongside active participation in meetings, seminars, and workshops, were vital for ongoing professional development. These gatherings provided invaluable opportunities for workers to engage with peers, share experiences, and enhance their knowledge and skills, fostering a sense of community, building solidarity, and improving service delivery to refugees.

Meetings, seminars, and workshops also provided platforms for frontline workers to raise concerns, seek support, and identify solutions to multifaceted challenges. By sharing experiences and insights, workers could collectively develop strategies to address complex issues related to refugee integration. Collaborative discussions helped identify common obstacles, promote innovative thinking, and contribute to the development of more effective and sustainable solutions. The context in which frontline workers operated played a significant role in shaping their coping mechanisms, behaviors, and the effectiveness of their roles. The challenges of their work environment, including policy ambiguity, emotional demands, and diverse client needs, required them to be adaptable, resilient, and supported by robust networks and continuous professional development.

Discussion

Frontline Decision-Making

Street-level bureaucracy theory, pioneered by Lipsky (1980), posits that public service workers are the ultimate policymakers in practice, given their direct interaction with the public and their consequential decisions on how to implement policy directives (Lipsky, 1980). The findings from Øksnes illustrate how these workers employ discretion to adapt policies to the individual circumstances of refugees, aligning closely with Lipsky's argument that discretion is essential for the effective implementation of policies on the ground.

My findings in Øksnes demonstrate that frontline workers' exercise of discretion in their daily tasks is inevitable, aligning with Lipsky's (1980) seminal claim about "street-level bureaucrats." This discretion is not a deviation from the norm but a fundamental aspect of frontline work, enabling practitioners to navigate the complexities of real-world scenarios and provide responsive services that cater to the unique circumstances of each individual and situation. The findings from Øksnes underscore the indispensable role of frontline worker discretion in ensuring the delivery of effective and equitable services to the community.

I found numerous instances where frontline workers exemplified the exercise of discretion as defined by Raymond W. Cox III (2005). These officials frequently faced decisions that required prioritizing certain activities over others, particularly in situations where resources were limited and community needs were high. This decision-making process was guided not only by practical assessments of immediate needs but also by deeper ethical considerations about fairness and equity, mirroring Cox's assertion that discretion involves ethical and political frameworks that define the boundaries of behavior.

My findings also demonstrated that these decisions were not routine but rather responses to specific situational demands, as Cox suggests when he states that "the situation and circumstances drive the decision to exercise discretion." (2005). Moreover, the capacity of Øksnes's frontline workers to exercise discretion did not merely stem from a desire to perform

their duties well but from their ability to make informed, a priori judgments about what was right for the immigrants and for their community.

The discretion exercised in adjusting the enrollment period for the integration program or determining the level of language support for children highlights the "positive discretion" described by Forsyth (1999). Positive discretion refers to the authority granted to officials to make decisions in specific cases or policy areas in a manner that optimally promotes a particular goal. It is particularly advantageous in complex situations, such as formulating strategic and long-range plans, where establishing rigid rules may hinder effective decision-making. In such cases, positive discretion allows officials to adapt their actions to the unique circumstances of each situation, consider various factors, and exercise judgment in achieving the desired outcome. This flexibility enables officials to navigate complex issues and make decisions that are tailored to the specific context, fostering adaptability and responsiveness to changing circumstances. (Forsyth, 1999).

In Øksnes, the discretionary practices observed among frontline workers—such as tailoring resource distribution and interpreting eligibility criteria—are critical for addressing the unique challenges faced by refugees. This aligns with Maynard-Moody and Musheno's (2003) depiction of frontline workers as "citizen-agents" who interpret policies through an empathetic lens, focusing on achieving the best outcomes for those they serve (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003). By customizing assistance based on detailed assessments of refugees' needs, these workers exemplify the adaptability that street-level bureaucracy theory emphasizes as necessary for policy effectiveness, particularly in complex, variable situations like refugee integration.

Furthermore, the role of frontline workers in Øksnes as cultural mediators underscores the nuanced application of discretion beyond mere policy implementation. According to Hupe and Buffat (2014), the discretion exercised by street-level bureaucrats involves not only the application but also the interpretation of policies in light of local contexts and individual histories (Hupe & Buffat, 2014). The efforts of Øksnes workers to bridge cultural divides and tailor communications about societal norms reflect a deep engagement with the discretionary space allowed to them, enabling more culturally sensitive and effective policy application.

The findings also touch on the critical balance that frontline workers must maintain between following official policies and adapting to practical realities, a theme extensively discussed in the literature on street-level bureaucracy. This balance is fraught with challenges, including the potential for inconsistencies in policy application and questions of accountability (Tummers et al., 2015). The reflections of a participant on the necessity to sometimes bypass ineffective routines in favor of results underscore the pragmatic adaptability that is characteristic of frontline discretion but also highlight the potential risks of such practices, including deviations from intended policy outcomes.

My research indicates that frontline workers in Øksnes are overwhelmed by their immediate duties, leaving them with little opportunity for reflection or for comprehending the broader bureaucratic context of their work. This context includes the layered municipal and regional bureaucracies, the distribution of responsibilities within the municipality, and the availability of resources locally and in wider areas. Despite an extensive review of the existing literature, I was unable to locate studies that specifically address how awareness of this broader context among frontline workers influences the implementation of policies. This gap highlights a potential area for further investigation, as understanding this relationship could provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by those at the forefront of public service delivery.

Workers' Experiences in Frontline

My findings reveal evidence of policy alienation among frontline workers. The sense of powerlessness, meaninglessness, and estrangement from policy objectives resonates with the theory of policy alienation discussed by Tummers (2013). According to Tummers, policy alienation involves several dimensions, including a lack of policy power and a perceived policy incongruence, which seem to mirror the experiences of the workers in Øksnes (Tummers, 2013).

Starting with the sense of powerlessness, my findings highlight a significant issue where frontline workers feel disconnected from the decision-making processes, despite being the implementers of these policies. This phenomenon aligns with the 'powerlessness' dimension of

Tummers' policy alienation theory, where workers perceive a lack of influence over policy (Tummers, 2013). The hierarchical and bureaucratic nature of decision-making in Øksnes, as described in my findings, underpins this feeling of alienation, where feedback loops are either non-existent or ineffective, rendering worker input seemingly irrelevant. Such a setup often leads to policies that do not reflect the practical realities of implementation, contributing to ineffective service provision and poor policy outcomes (Hupe & Hill, 2007).

Furthermore, the reported estrangement and perceived meaninglessness resonate with the 'policy meaninglessness' and 'policy estrangement' dimensions of policy alienation (Tummers, 2013). Frontline workers not only struggle to see the relevance and efficacy of policies but also feel detached from the overall goals these policies purport to serve. This is exemplified in my findings where policies intended to integrate refugees swiftly clash with bureaucratic procedures that impede this goal, such as the non-recognition of foreign qualifications. Such discrepancies lead to frustration and a diminishing sense of professional satisfaction, impacting the motivation levels of workers adversely (Tummers et al., 2015).

In sum, the experiences of frontline workers in Øksnes as outlined in my findings demonstrate a case of policy alienation that aligns with existing theories. This disconnection not only undermines the objectives of refugee integration policies but also impacts the overall morale and efficiency of those tasked with implementing these policies. Future research might explore strategies to reduce policy alienation by involving frontline workers more actively in policy formulation and decision-making processes, thereby potentially enhancing policy coherence and effectiveness (Tummers & Bekkers, 2014).

Overcoming Entrenched Barriers

The challenges identified in the Øksnes municipality, as described in the findings, relate to the theory of institutional inertia. Institutions are often resistant to change even when external circumstances demand it (Zantvoort, 2015). Zantvoort (2015) defines 'inertia' as an irrational resistance to change seen in individuals and institutions. Institutions, concepts, and power structures often become entrenched over time, rendering them ineffective or obsolete, despite

their initial legitimacy or usefulness. He identifies a common set of problems underlying resistance to change in individuals, social structures, and the development of knowledge (Zantvoort, 2015). This resistance to change is particularly detrimental in the context of refugee integration, a field requiring high adaptability due to fluctuating conditions and diverse needs.

Institutional inertia in Øksnes is evident through the lack of well-defined roles and an organizational system that remains static despite the dynamic nature of integration challenges. As noted, the current job descriptions, responsibilities, and organizational frameworks may have been adequate at one point but have become insufficient over time as conditions change (Peters, 2019). This misalignment can be viewed as institutional inertia. Existing structures and systems may persist because they are embedded within the broader institutional environment, making them resistant to necessary reforms (Henisz & Delios, 2000).

The theory of bureaucratic or organizational inertia further helps to explain the difficulties in implementing changes to these structures. According to Marcus Goncalves (2007), a significant factor contributing to resistance to change within organizations is the prevailing organizational culture. In the absence of a clear understanding of the organizational culture by its leadership, effecting change among employees becomes more challenging. Essentially, organizational culture embodies a set of shared beliefs and practices developed over time to address various challenges. The effectiveness of these practices leads employees to perceive them as the appropriate course of action (Goncalves, 2007, pp. 64-75). Goncalves underlines that when considering organizational change, it is essential to understand the root causes or drivers of the need for change. While this understanding may not be as crucial in proactive change efforts, it becomes more relevant in reactive approaches. In reactive change, understanding the source of the change is important for developing strategies to address it. However, it is important to note that reactive change may not always lead to positive outcomes, as it may be driven by external factors rather than internal innovation. proactive change, on the other hand, involves anticipating and initiating change before external forces necessitate it (Goncalves, 2007, pp. 64-75).

Moreover, the existence of unclear responsibility distribution, as highlighted in the findings, is a form of inertia. This ambiguity leads to inefficiencies such as duplicated efforts and delayed

responses, as departments operate in silos, often unaware or uncertain of their overlapping functions with others. The high turnover rate among new employees further complicates this scenario, as continual departures inhibit the accumulation of institutional knowledge and expertise necessary for effective adaptation and change. Kauppila (2014) posits that the success of management activities, such as task supervision and strategic planning, heavily relies on employees' understanding of their roles and the organization's expectations. Thus, employee role clarity is a critical factor in management theory and practice (p. 756). Their research findings indicate that employees who perceive their work as being controlled by their own actions and those with stronger self-efficacy beliefs experience significantly higher role clarity compared to employees lacking these control beliefs. Moreover, employees with high-quality relationships with their leaders report significantly higher levels of role clarity. Additionally, the organization's deliberate strategy-making process positively influences employee role clarity (Kauppila, 2014).

Ginsberg and Abrahamson (1991) posit that internal factors for change within organizations often involve key individuals or groups acting as catalysts. The introduction of new members to the top management team, for instance, can significantly counteract the inertia that often hinders the implementation of strategic shifts. The fresh perspectives of the new members and influence can be crucial in overcoming resistance to change. Ginsberg and Abrahamson (1991) also find that management consultants play a unique role by shaping new managerial perspectives of the environment, thereby creating pressure for change. While the consultants' influence might be more substantial in altering mindsets than in driving radical strategic shifts, their ability to challenge existing assumptions and stimulate new ways of thinking is invaluable for organizational adaptation (Ginsberg & Abrahamson, 1991). My findings in Øksnes suggest that the leadership in Øksnes has yet to effectively address these issues, implying a need for stronger internal and external catalysts for change.

In summary, the findings from Øksnes municipality exemplify the impact of institutional inertia on the effectiveness of refugee integration efforts. By applying the theoretical framework of institutional inertia, it becomes evident that overcoming these entrenched challenges requires not only recognizing the symptoms of inertia but also implementing strategic interventions that encourage adaptability and responsiveness to changing conditions.

Tacit Knowledge and Organizational Barriers

The findings from the interviews with frontline workers in Øksnes municipality offer a rich context to examine the role of tacit knowledge in the public sector, particularly in fields involving complex human interactions such as refugee integration. Tacit knowledge, as conceptualized by Polanyi, encompasses the kind of knowledge that is difficult to communicate and often acquired through personal experience and interactions rather than through formal education or written instructions (Polanyi, 1966). The observations in Øksnes municipality underscore the significance of fostering an environment conducive to the sharing of this implicit knowledge.

The situation in Øksnes municipality illustrates a pivotal concern in knowledge management: the architecture of an organization can significantly hinder or facilitate the fluid movement and utility of tacit knowledge. The structural barriers highlighted by Kakabadse et al. (2001), such as rigid organizational frameworks and fragmented departments, are visibly at play in Øksnes, where departmental silos complicate coherent strategy formation and execution across the municipality's diverse administrative units. This fragmentation disrupts the natural flow of tacit knowledge which, as Cox III et al. (2008) describe, is mutable and tightly intertwined with its context. The strength of tacit knowledge lies in its proximity to action; when organizational structures do not support seamless interactions and the easy transfer of unwritten insights, the full potential of this knowledge remains untapped. Such barriers not only stifle innovation and adaptability but also risk the degradation of knowledge over time, as it becomes isolated within parts of the organization that lack interconnectivity.

In Øksnes, the effectiveness of immigration policies heavily depends on the quality of social capital—trust, norms, and social identification among team members and between teams and the immigrant community. This reliance is underscored by the research of Gubbins & Dooley (2021), who argue that such relational components are crucial for successful knowledge sharing. In practice, when trust is established among frontline workers and with immigrants, there's a more robust exchange of tacit knowledge. This knowledge is essential for understanding cultural

nuances and individual needs, which are rarely documented but crucial for effective integration strategies. However, building this trust is not straightforward; it requires consistent, positive interactions that go beyond formal meetings and into the realm of genuine relationship building. Without this foundation, even well-intentioned policies may fail to achieve their intended impact due to a lack of deep understanding and mutual respect, which are necessary for the nuanced application of tacit knowledge in complex social settings like those in Øksnes.

High staff turnover in Øksnes represents a critical barrier to the effective management and retention of tacit knowledge, aligning with the issues highlighted by Cox III et al. (2008) regarding the continuity of organizational memory. Each departure of a staff member carries away unique insights and experiences that are not formally captured, thus eroding the collective memory and experiential wealth of the organization. This loss is particularly detrimental in contexts requiring high levels of personalized knowledge and nuanced understanding, such as immigration services. The frequent turnover not only interrupts the flow of tacit knowledge but also imposes a recurrent burden on the organization to reintegrate and retrain new employees, a process that is often time-consuming and inefficient. Addressing this issue requires a strategic approach to human resource management, focusing on enhancing job satisfaction, career development opportunities, and workplace culture to improve staff retention. Additionally, developing a more robust knowledge management system that includes strategies for capturing tacit knowledge from outgoing employees could mitigate the impact of staff turnover by preserving critical organizational knowledge and facilitating smoother transitions for new personnel.

Frontline Strategies

The findings from Øksnes municipality regarding the reliance of frontline workers on various coping mechanisms to manage the complexities of refugee integration align closely with the existing theoretical discussion on discretion within public administration. Discretion, as a concept, refers to the latitude given to frontline workers in executing their duties and making decisions within the constraints of policy frameworks (Lipsky, 1980). The data from the interviews illustrate how frontline workers in Øksnes exercise discretion not only in

decision-making processes but also in developing strategies to cope with the structural and emotional challenges of their work. The frontline workers I studied faced overwhelming workloads and limited resources, much like the scenarios Lipsky described in his seminal work. These conditions forced them to exercise significant discretion, crafting routines and methods that often deviated from their official directives (Lipsky, 1980, p. xviii).

The establishment of networks among workers from various sectors and the larger community, as highlighted in the findings, is a crucial aspect of discretion where workers extend their professional boundaries to enhance their effectiveness. Such networking aligns with the findings of Lotta and Marques (2020). Their study shows that the establishment of networks among workers from various sectors and the larger community is a crucial aspect of discretion where workers extend their professional boundaries to enhance their effectiveness. Frontline workers, who act as a bridge between policy and the community, have different ways of working based on their individual choices and their relationships within the community. Their study further reveals that those workers who have stronger and more diverse connections within the community tend to use styles that involve translating information and making references to shared experiences. This is because they have a deeper understanding of the local context and can draw on their relationships with both service users and other professionals. On the other hand, workers with weaker community connections tend to use more technical styles. This may be because they lack the knowledge and understanding of the local context that comes from having strong relationships within the community. Overall, the work styles of frontline workers are influenced by a combination of their individual choices, their relationships within the community, and the knowledge they have acquired through their work and life experiences (Lotta & Marques, 2020, p. 356).

Emotional management, another coping mechanism identified, ties closely to the concept of emotional labor in public service (Guy et al., 2014). Frontline workers are often required to manage their emotional expressions to align with the professional demands of their roles, a process that can be both psychologically taxing and critical for effective service delivery. This aspect of their work underscores the emotional dimension of discretion where workers must not only decide on the best administrative action but also manage personal emotional responses in

highly sensitive environments. However, Nguyen & Velayutham (2018) find that welfare workers often go beyond their regular duties to emotionally support their clients. This is not just about being nice; it comes from a deep understanding of how various factors – like government policies, cultural issues, and personal experiences – affect people's lives. This understanding, known as “critical empathy”, helps them comprehend the broader context and better understand their clients' situations. Nguyen & Velayutham (2018) further posit that by using critical empathy, frontline workers can provide better services and connect with a wider range of clients. This empathy comes from recognizing that the welfare system can be challenging for many different groups of people, not just one specific group. Because of this, frontline workers are more likely to maintain their emotional support efforts and apply them to various clients (Nguyen & Velayutham, 2018, p. 167-8).

Role flexibility and the necessity to perform tasks beyond formal job descriptions reflect the dynamic nature of frontline work (Biddle, 1979). While such flexibility is often essential in addressing immediate and diverse needs of refugees, it can lead to increased stress and burnout if not properly managed. The study conducted by Abraham et al. (2022) sheds light on the relationship between role clarity and emotional exhaustion among frontline workers. The findings indicate that frontline workers who experience role ambiguity, characterized by uncertainty regarding their roles, job duties, and the extent of their authority, are more likely to feel emotionally exhausted by their work (Abraham et al., 2022).

In Øksnes, the workers’ desire for clear personal boundaries and structured role definitions is a coping mechanism that aligns with the need to define the limits of responsibility to prevent role overload. This approach is crucial in sustaining worker well-being and effectiveness, emphasizing the necessity for policies that clearly define roles and provide support mechanisms to manage the boundaries of these roles effectively.

Conclusion

The extensive research conducted in Øksnes offers a demonstration of the role that discretion plays among frontline workers in public service, affirming the theories posited by Lipsky (1980) regarding "street-level bureaucrats." This study underscores the inevitability and necessity of discretion in the practical application of policies, as these workers directly interact with the public and tailor services to meet specific needs. Such adaptability is vital for addressing the real-world complexities that rigid, one-size-fits-all policies often fail to accommodate. The nuanced use of discretion, as demonstrated in Øksnes, aligns well with Lipsky's argument that these frontline workers effectively become the ultimate policymakers by interpreting and implementing directives in a manner that is sensitive to the unique circumstances of their clientele.

Moreover, the findings resonate with the principles described by Cox (2005), who emphasizes that discretion involves ethical and political frameworks guiding decision-making, especially under resource constraints and high community needs. This study brings to light how frontline workers operate within these frameworks, making prioritized, ethically guided decisions that reflect a deep understanding of both the immediate and broader implications for the individuals and communities they serve. This form of discretion can also be seen as "positive discretion," as Forsyth (1999) notes, which refers to the authority granted to officials to make decisions in specific cases or policy areas in a manner that optimally promotes a particular goal.

The role of frontline workers in Øksnes also exemplifies the portrayal by Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003) of street-level bureaucrats as "citizen-agents" who employ empathy in their policy interpretations to achieve the best possible outcomes for those under their care. This empathetic approach facilitates a more customized, effective assistance to refugees, addressing their unique needs and challenges. Additionally, the cultural mediation conducted by these workers, as highlighted by Hupe and Buffat (2014), further illustrates the discretionary space utilized to not just apply but also interpret policies in a culturally informed manner, enhancing the effectiveness of policy implementation in diverse societal settings.

However, this study also reveals the delicate balance that frontline workers must maintain between adherence to official policies and the practical adaptations required by their daily tasks. As Tummers et al. (2015) discuss, this balancing act can lead to inconsistencies and challenges in policy application, raising questions about accountability and the potential for deviations from intended policy outcomes. The reflections from Øksnes indicate that while frontline workers are adept at navigating these complexities, they also face significant pressures that can limit their capacity for broader reflection on the bureaucratic contexts of their roles. This aspect of the findings suggests a valuable area for further research, particularly in exploring how an enhanced understanding of these broader contexts could support frontline workers in more effectively implementing policies.

The findings also reveal an alignment with Tummers' theory of policy alienation (2013), particularly highlighting the detrimental effects of feeling powerless, estranged, and finding policies meaningless. These findings underscore a significant issue within the public administration and policy implementation sectors, especially in contexts demanding high adaptability and sensitivity such as refugee integration. The frontline workers' perceived disconnection from decision-making processes and the irrelevance of policies to real-world applications are critical factors that not only impede effective policy execution but also contribute to decreased job satisfaction and motivation among those tasked with these roles (Tummers, 2013; Tummers et al., 2015).

Moreover, the mismatch between the intended goals of refugee integration policies and the actual bureaucratic impediments encountered reinforces the sense of meaninglessness and estrangement from policy objectives. Such structural issues within the decision-making hierarchy in Øksnes, characterized by ineffective feedback mechanisms and top-down approaches, exacerbate the alienation felt by frontline workers. This systemic failure to acknowledge and integrate frontline input into policy formulation suggests a broader issue of governance and administrative oversight, where the lack of policy power significantly undermines both the efficacy of service provision and the achievement of policy goals (Hupe & Hill, 2007; Tummers & Bekkers, 2014).

The study reveals inertia within the system that hinders its necessary adaptation to external changes. This inertia, manifested through outdated job descriptions and inflexible organizational structures, reflects an entrenched culture that resists change. Despite evolving external conditions that demand adaptability, the organization remains resistant to transformation. This resistance is rooted in the very structure and culture of the organization, where roles and responsibilities have not been updated to reflect current needs, leading to inefficiencies such as duplicated efforts and delayed responses (Peters, 2019).

Inertia in Øksnes is further compounded by a lack of understanding of the organizational culture by its leadership. Marcus Goncalves (2007) highlights the critical role of organizational culture, which embodies shared beliefs and established practices that employees view as the correct course of action. The difficulty arises when these established practices no longer align with external demands, yet persist because they are deeply embedded within the organization's culture. Moreover, the high turnover rate exacerbates this situation, preventing the accumulation of institutional knowledge necessary for informed decision-making and effective change implementation (Goncalves, 2007).

The concept of role clarity as discussed by Kauppila (2014) is crucial in understanding the additional layers of resistance within Øksnes. Employees lacking a clear understanding of their roles are less likely to adapt to changes proactively. This clarity is essential for employees to feel empowered and to align their actions with the organization's strategic objectives, thereby enhancing the overall responsiveness to integration challenges. The absence of clear roles not only hinders operational efficiency but also affects strategic planning and supervision, critical elements in managing change within dynamic environments like refugee integration.

Ginsberg and Abrahamson (1991) suggest, overcoming institutional inertia often requires catalysts such as new leadership or external consultants who can introduce fresh perspectives and challenge entrenched beliefs. In the context of Øksnes, the leadership appears to have not fully leveraged such catalysts to initiate necessary strategic shifts. This underutilization contributes to the ongoing misalignment between the organization's structure and the dynamic requirements of effective refugee integration. Without significant internal and external pressures for change, the

municipality is likely to continue facing difficulties in adapting its practices to meet the needs of a fluctuating and diverse refugee population.

The findings provide a case study on the critical role and management of tacit knowledge within public sector organizations. Tacit knowledge, characterized by its non-codified, experiential nature, plays a vital role in handling complex human interactions, such as those required in refugee integration efforts. The case in Øksnes underscores the importance of organizational architecture that promotes the free flow and utility of tacit knowledge. Structural barriers, as highlighted by Kakabadse et al. (2001), such as rigid organizational frameworks and fragmented departments, notably impede this process. These barriers prevent the effective sharing of tacit knowledge across the organization, leading to disjointed strategies and reduced efficacy in policy implementation.

The significance of social capital in facilitating tacit knowledge transfer within Øksnes is evident. Trust, social norms, and social identification are crucial, as outlined by Gubbins & Dooley (2021), for the successful sharing of this type of knowledge. In environments like Øksnes, where such relational components are fostered among team members and the immigrant community, there is a stronger exchange of tacit knowledge. This exchange is essential for understanding the subtle cultural nuances and individual needs necessary for effective integration strategies. However, high staff turnover poses a significant challenge to maintaining continuity in this knowledge flow. As Cox III et al. (2008) discuss, turnover can lead to a loss of organizational memory and the erosion of tacit knowledge, highlighting the need for strategic human resource management practices aimed at enhancing job satisfaction and retention, and thus preserving valuable institutional knowledge.

The case of Øksnes municipality illustrates the challenges and necessities of managing tacit knowledge in public sector settings, particularly in complex, interaction-heavy fields like refugee integration. Effective knowledge management strategies must address both the structural and relational dimensions of the organization. This involves restructuring organizational frameworks to reduce barriers to knowledge flow and implementing human resource strategies that enhance retention and capture critical tacit knowledge before it exits the organization. Only through such

comprehensive approaches can organizations hope to fully leverage the untapped potential of tacit knowledge to improve service delivery and policy efficacy.

Frontline workers in Øksnes exercise discretion not only in their decision-making processes but also in their development of coping strategies to manage both structural and emotional challenges. The creation of networks among workers across different sectors, as detailed in the studies by Lotta and Marques (2020), highlights a proactive extension of professional boundaries that enhances effectiveness and illustrates a sophisticated understanding of the local context. These networks enable workers to employ varied work styles tailored to their relationships within the community, thereby facilitating more nuanced and effective service delivery.

The emotional management strategies identified in the findings align with the concept of emotional labor as discussed by Guy et al. (2014). The ability of frontline workers to manage their emotional expressions underlines the emotional dimension of discretion and is essential for maintaining professional demeanor and effective service delivery. The concept of "critical empathy" identified by Nguyen & Velayutham (2018) further enriches this understanding, showing how deep personal and cultural insights are crucial for frontline workers to effectively support and connect with their clients across diverse circumstances.

The necessity for role flexibility, as explored in the context of role ambiguity and role conflict (Biddle, 1979), reflects the dynamic and often unpredictable nature of frontline work. The relationship between role clarity and emotional exhaustion, as investigated by Abraham et al. (2022), is particularly poignant, highlighting the risks of stress and burnout that can arise from the uncertainties inherent in these roles. These findings emphasize the critical need for structured support systems and clearer definitions of roles to mitigate emotional exhaustion among frontline workers.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from Øksnes, it is recommended that public service training programs incorporate comprehensive modules on the ethical and effective use of discretion. These modules

should emphasize the development of skills necessary for making judicious decisions that reflect both the spirit and the letter of the policies they are meant to enact. Further, policy frameworks should be designed to be flexible, allowing for adjustments by frontline workers in response to situational needs without compromising the consistency and fairness of service delivery.

Developing a structured guideline that emphasizes 'positive discretion' could also be beneficial, enabling workers to make decisions that optimally serve community interests while adhering to ethical standards. Additionally, implementing regular assessment and feedback mechanisms can ensure that these discretionary practices effectively meet community needs and align with organizational goals. Encouraging collaboration between workers to share best practices and experiences can foster a supportive environment that nurtures informed and ethically guided decision-making.

Support systems, such as counseling and peer support groups, should also be established to alleviate the pressures faced by frontline workers, enabling them to engage more deeply with their roles without feeling overwhelmed.

To further support the effectiveness of frontline workers in Øksnes, it is recommended that local government and organizational leadership actively foster the creation and sustainability of cross-sector networks. Such initiatives could include dedicated forums for regular communication and resource sharing, training programs to enhance interdisciplinary understanding, and recognition incentives to celebrate collaborative successes. Additionally, policy adjustments should be made to formalize the role of these networks within community service frameworks, ensuring that workers are empowered and protected as they navigate the complexities of their roles. By institutionalizing these networks, Øksnes can enhance its service delivery, making it more adaptive and responsive to local needs.

It is recommended that public administration bodies implement more inclusive and participatory decision-making processes. By actively involving frontline workers in the creation and modification of policies, particularly those related to sensitive areas like refugee integration, organizations can mitigate feelings of powerlessness and estrangement. This can be achieved

through regular consultation sessions, feedback mechanisms, and policy co-design initiatives. Additionally, providing clear, ongoing training and support to ensure that policies are understood and felt relevant can enhance job satisfaction and motivation. Such measures would not only improve the implementation of policies but also boost the overall effectiveness of public service delivery.

To address inertia in Øksnes and realign the organizational culture with external demands, it is essential for the leadership to undertake a thorough assessment of the current culture and its impact on the organization's agility. This can be facilitated through structured cultural audits and employee feedback mechanisms. Leadership should also focus on developing a strong change management strategy that includes comprehensive training programs aimed at bridging the gap between existing practices and new organizational needs. Additionally, implementing mentorship and knowledge-sharing initiatives could mitigate the impact of high turnover by ensuring continuity and the retention of institutional knowledge. These efforts should be supported by clear communication from the top management, emphasizing the importance of adaptability and continuous improvement within the organizational culture.

Additionally, Øksnes should consider bringing in external consultants or new leadership to provide fresh perspectives and challenge existing paradigms. Such steps would help bridge the current gap between organizational structure and the dynamic requirements of effective integration, fostering a more proactive and strategically aligned workforce.

To enhance the management and utility of tacit knowledge within Øksnes municipality, it is recommended that the municipality revisits and modifies its structural framework. This could include the development of cross-departmental teams and the establishment of less hierarchical, more networked organizational structures to promote interaction and communication. Additionally, implementing formal mentorship programs where experienced staff are paired with new employees can facilitate a more structured transfer of critical knowledge, mitigating the impact of high turnover by ensuring continuity in insights and practices.

On the relational front, Øksnes municipality should focus on enhancing social capital to foster a stronger internal community and boost knowledge sharing. Investing in team-building activities that strengthen trust and mutual respect among staff members is crucial. Moreover, introducing incentives for knowledge sharing and establishing recognition programs for contributions to team learning can motivate employees to engage more deeply. Lastly, to address the challenge of high staff turnover, the municipality should develop attractive retention strategies such as career development opportunities, competitive benefits, and a supportive work environment that prioritizes employee well-being and job satisfaction.

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