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**Communicative Action to Mediate Policy Implementation in
Government Organizations: Theorizing Policy Implementation as a
Practice**

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Abstract

Communicative Action to Mediate Policy Implementation in Government Organizations: Theorizing Policy Implementation as a Practice

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Change is a constant theme in organizations, and policy implementation or change implemented from the top-down can have its challenges. This project aimed to identify and assess current work strategies used to support changes from legislative policy implementation and develop communication interventions to navigate its dilemmas. Through a study of change implementation at a government agency, the researcher identified five dilemmas that centered around managing feedback between employees, conflicting perspectives between stakeholders, and gaps in staff resources. Findings suggested that employees at this agency developed a set of five strategies used to manage the problems and dilemmas brought on by policy implementation. Practical implications from this study indicate organizations should assess whether similar dilemmas exist during their change initiatives. Furthermore, collaborative technologies were pivotal to supporting remote work operations and completing time-sensitive work.

Key words: grounded practical theory; government; organizational change; policy implementation

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	4
Introduction.....	8
Study Background.....	10
Literature Review.....	12
Organizational Work Practices	12
Grounded Practical Theory	16
RQ1: What are the communication dilemmas associated with the new legislative bill?.....	20
Organizational Communication Strategies During Change.....	20
RQ2: What communication strategies are used by employees to support the practice of policy implementation?.....	24
Methods.....	25
Participants and Recruitment Protocol.....	25
Interview Data Collection Procedures	26
Data Analysis Methods	28
Findings	32
Communication Dilemmas	32
Current Work and Communication Strategies.....	39
Discussion.....	45
Situated Ideals and Theoretical Implications.....	45
Recommendations.....	49
Practical Implications.....	51

Limitations	52
Conclusion	54
Appendix	55
Interview Protocol.....	55
Hiarchical Coding Sample	57
References.....	59

Introduction

Government agencies are central to administering and conducting routine operations such as elections, land management, and the provision of health and retirement benefits. A common practice for government agencies is the implementation of new legislative policies. Policy implementation can generally be defined as series of actions by groups of stakeholders that aim to achieve the objectives set by the policy in government organizations (Van Meter, 1975). These policies are voted on and passed by elected officials who represent each state. Policies are also often deliberated in the legislature by agency representatives and legislators to ensure the proposed changes work to improve their programs. This often includes proposing additions to policies and removing certain provisions that certain parties cannot agree on. However, once these policies are passed the implications of these changes place agencies in a dilemmatic situation. For example, a review of federal social programs like the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965 and the 1970 Clean Air Amendments suggested these programs needed to be altered to fit within the confines of agencies at the local government level if they were to be considered successfully implemented (Sabatier, 1979). This suggests the implementation of new policies at government agencies at all levels is challenging because it introduces changes across multiple organizational levels.

Implementing new policy can also be challenging because policy work may conflict with routine program administration. For example, in this study, much of the agencies' day-to-day tasks are outsourced to a contracted insurance vendor to handle their member communication. To navigate these dilemmas, government agencies have

communication strategies in place to solve the dilemmas associated with policy implementation.

This project aimed to identify and assess current work strategies used to support legislative policy implementation and develop communication interventions to navigate its dilemmas. By conducting employee interviews, the main goal of this study was to identify and facilitate discussions about communication strategies that help manage the challenges of implementing new legislative policy that impact the agency's programs. Findings from this study will inform how the agency confronts the dilemmas associated with policy implementation and address hiring additional staff.

Study Background

The site of study was a government agency located in the U.S. This agency manages a pension system and administers health insurance for employees in other governmental organizations. The agency is governed by a board that directs policy and strategic initiatives. Comprised of over 1,000 employees, the agency is separated into three major divisions: investments, health benefit services, and executive. These areas provide services to over 700,000 participants. The area of focus (health benefit services) has five main sub-divisions comprised of financial services, data management, communication and engagement, workplace operations, and actuarial services.

Much of the day-to-day work associated with these areas is related to maintaining documentation and administering benefits programs. For example, a key initiative for the department is to update annual health insurance plan information materials in coordination with their insurance vendor. This work can include updating language around new benefit changes for the upcoming plan year and educating key constituents on changes in premium rates and coverage for their insurance plan options. The agency has seen an increase in the organizations it serves leaving this program due to high insurance costs, with the notion they can self-insure their own plan at a more affordable rate by offering competing coverage.

As the researcher started fieldwork, the state government passed laws that introduced new policy that the agency needed to administer. The new policy affected if and how other organizations would participate in the insurance they coordinate. The department underwent several internal initiatives centered around implementing these

policy changes. Many of these internal initiatives focused on updating legal and policy documentation and processes and implementing a new claims data request process. In the case of the claims data request process, the department has had to create a new, streamlined feature in their employer portal system that allows organizations to request their data instead of having to formally submit a request to the agency.

Overall, these new policies were a priority for many of the employees at the agency. The increase in new policy work has driven the department to expand each of their sub-divisions to add at least two full time employees to help address competing priorities amongst managerial staff. While the department hired a few new staff, they still require data management and financial services staff with the technical expertise to start the new claims data request system. Additionally, the agency continued to grapple with balancing priorities between day-to-day tasks associated with supporting members and new legislative policy. Having additional staff to help manage this balance was critical to maintaining an efficient workplace.

Approving and hiring new positions in the public sector can be challenging due to its fiscal restraints and processes centered around justifying new hires. Many new full-time employee appointments must be approved by their governing board and factored into an annual budget. Due to this process, the average time-to hire in the public sector is approximately 119 days, three times higher than the private sector (NEOGOV, 2020). Even once new support staff are hired, it can take several months to train them on their day-to-day tasks. Therefore, the agency could benefit from communicative strategies to navigate the dilemmas associated with policy implementation.

Literature Review

Organizational Work Practices

The practice of study was new policy implementation at the government agency. To identify and assess this practice in an organizational context, it is important first to detail what exactly is a practice. According to Giddens (1984), practices can be described as social actions that recursively produce and reproduce structures that constrain and enable actions. Feldman and Orlikowski (2011), argued a practice lens can be a useful tool in an organizational context because of their complex and dynamic settings in which they operate. Therefore, it is useful for researchers to examine organizations through a finite practice lens.

Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) outlined three different ways to study practice, an empirical approach, a theoretical focus, and philosophical focus. The empirical approach places actions as central to organizational outcomes and reinforces the importance of practices in workplace operations. One defining aspect of this approach is it answers the “what” of a practice lens. The second approach, the theoretical approach, focusses on an explanation for the activity of study. The defining question this approach answers is the “how” of a practice lens and the dynamics of day-to-day tasks and how they operate over time within the organization. The final philosophical approach operates on the notion that social reality is made up of practices. This approach answers the “why” of a practice lens with a focus on day-to-day activities due to the idea that practices construct social reality (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). For this study, the researcher utilized these three

approaches, with a focus on the philosophical due to its focus on explaining the nature of policy implementation within the social construct of the agency.

Important to this study was practice theory, a theory that examines the relationship between situated action and the social world in which the action or practice takes place. Practice theorists tend to adhere to three different principles of this relationship: situated actions have consequences in the social world, dualisms are rejected as a way of theorizing, and finally relations are mutually constitutive (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). The practice theory lens was important to this study due to its connection of observing action within the context of the social world. This lends a theoretical arm to the practice of policy implementation within this government agency because it advanced the current practices in place to create solutions to the dilemmas during this organizational change.

Practice theory was important to this study because it allowed the researcher to examine how implementation of new policy works within the social construct of the agency. Examining this practice at the theoretical level also allowed the researcher to understand how strategies are formulated, and adapted or adopted in the workplace. Furthermore, identifying strategies during data analysis were crucial to this study because it helped support RQ2.

Leonardi (2015) offers empirical guidance of studying work practices. To understand how work practices provide an understanding of the relationship between organizations and the actions that give them coherence, scholars should focus on the process of organizing as it occurs (Leonardi, 2015). Outlined in this article are five

overlapping characteristics that make up work practices. Materiality bound emphasizes, “...the importance of considering the ongoing negotiation between the material and social elements of practice” (Leonardi, 2015, p. 240). Recurrently enacted is a practice characteristic enacted over time and occurs in patterns. Once enactment ceases, there are no patterns in which organizational structures can be built. In the case of this agency, employees use collaborative technology to support policy implementation, thus reinforcing the notion that organizational practices are mutually enacted. The third characteristic is temporally emergent aspect of work practices, meaning patterns of resistance to change can be “unfolded in practice” (Leonardi, 2015, p. 243). The fourth, historically influenced, suggests practices continue over time because people refer to past actions so they can act consistently when presented with new information. Finally, work practices are goal oriented, meaning that members of an organization have certain work practices to complete goals. Thus, they have these practices in place for their own organizational survival and practice scholars should understand the trajectory of practices to explain how they achieve goals (Leonardi, 2015).

Leonardi (2015), states that work practices often take on a communicative role, shared with employees of an organizational community. By working this way, these shared practices offer membership to a community of practice because communal practices are built through social production (Leonardi, 2015). Wenger (1999), describes a community of practice as a collective of practices developed over time that reflect both the pursuit of shared enterprise and social relations. This context is crucial to know because the agency of study was a community of practice because members shared the

same goal of administering programs and implementing new policy to their programs. Therefore, to understand how employees at the agency are implementing new policy the researcher has identified literature around this practice.

Based on Leonardi's (2015) characteristics, the work practice of study was policy implementation at a government agency. Literature around policy implementation suggests that because implementation normally uses a top-down approach to instilling policy knowledge at the agency level is especially difficult (Hudson et al, 2019). Canary (2010), examined the communicative construction of policy knowledge of the federal Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) across several groups in an elementary school district. Knowledge construction mirrors practice and contextual sense-making and takes into consideration the intersection of different systems in the knowledge construction process. The author assesses how the role of contradictions build on knowledge construction processes. Contradictions in policy contexts are often present and inherent features of policy context that employees in organizational contexts should accept and manage (Canary, 2010). In the context of the present study, the contradictions that emerged are negative features of the policy implementation process because it leads to inhibiting the creation of agency knowledge of perceived public lobbying by stakeholders. The agency is prohibited from lobbying to its constituents in the legislature and the public. Canary (2010) would classify this agency contradiction as a secondary contradiction because there are two existing elements of a system that cannot be resolved without transforming its elements and practices.

Practical implications from Canary (2010) indicate policy knowledge within organizations is created by having opportunities to participate in “learning-by-doing”, with opportunities to interact with other members about how to manage contradictions. Another key finding suggests agreeing for the sake of professionalism prevents individuals from expressing alternative perspectives and opinions that could lead to improved decision making about how to implement policy (Canary, 2010). These implications are important to account for the present study because it reinforced the situated ideal statements in the discussion section. The following section will detail Grounded Practical Theory and effective communication strategies used to support a change initiative like policy implementation. After the presentation of each literature section, the researcher will pose research questions.

Grounded Practical Theory

Central to examining the practice of policy implementation was Grounded Practical Theory (GPT). Due to its cultivation of the practice of communication, GPT also has the capability of improving the quality of communication by solving problems and establishing better practices (Craig & Tracy, 2014). GPT is a generative metatheory that aims to inform further practices within organizations or communities. It is generative in the sense that communication interventions and solutions emerge from analysis. Craig and Tracy (1995), initially presented GPT in contrast to scientific theory which primarily concerns itself with what *is*. Craig and Tracy argued that communication research at the

time adhered to scientific theory and neglected normative theory, which concerns itself with what *ought to be*.

Normative theorizing allows practical strategies to open itself to interpretation and understanding and require researchers to reflect and discuss technical rationality.

Technical rationality uses theory to solve problems (Schön, 1983). The authors used the term *praxis* to embody this conceptualization of practice as an action informed by reflection. Freire (1970), can expand the understanding of praxis in that there can be no true word or dialogue without praxis. Meaning, to speak truth in dialogue it can transform the social world. Freire illustrated this by demonstrating that action and reflection inform the word, which translates into work, and ultimately forms praxis (Freire, 1970).

Therefore, if normative theory were to be practically useful, it must follow actual problems of communicative praxis. Due to this need for a more useful normative theory-based methodology, Craig and Tracy (1995) presented GPT.

Communication as a practical discipline provides an important contribution by combining praxis with a third Aristotelian category of knowledge, *poiesis* (productive arts). Craig and Tracy (1995) characterized communication as both, “a morally and politically significant social practice and a skilled productive activity involving the use of technologies” (p. 252). The dilemma however is uniting the two aspects praxis and *techne* within the field of communication. To address this, the authors provide theoretical reconstruction of a practice to give idealization to a practice. Through idealizing, theoretical reconstruction rationalizes the practice, placing value to make a good practice. According to Craig (2006), for communication to be understood as a practice it should be

a, “cultural concept of communication referring to the general kind of practice that people are engaged in whenever they communicate” (pg. 41). Meaning, how individuals in cultures are thinking about communicating is a key ethnographic variable to assess (Craig, 2006). Practical theory can be understood as a rational reconstruction of a practice.

To facilitate this rational reconstruction of a practice, Craig and Tracy (1995) provide a problem-centered model for GPT, a three-level theoretical model in which a practice can be reconstructed. The first level is the technical level, where a practice is reconstructed through repetitive communication strategies and techniques. The second level is the problem level, where problems or dilemmas emerge from the practice of study. In this study, the research aimed to identify communication dilemmas. Communication dilemmas occur when members of social networks (like organizations), “have incentives not to share, but to accumulate more knowledge than other network members even though such behavior delays the achievement of network goals” (Bonacich, 1990, p. 458). The third level, the philosophical level, the practice can be reconstructed into ideals or principles that provide a solution to the problem. During reflection at this level, alternative “situated ideals” may present themselves bringing the practitioners closer to using strategies and techniques over others (Craig & Tracy, 1995).

An example of the three levels of GPT can be highlighted in Bloom (2014). This article applied GPT to analyze participants who ran temporary medical and dental clinics in the Dominican Republic. The author assessed how these individuals developed strategies to respond to differences in language across different nations at the clinics

(Bloom, 2014). The problem level occurred when the English-speaking healthcare professionals had issues communicating and building rapport with non-English speaking patients about their condition (Bloom, 2014). The nature of the problem occurred when US participants that could not speak Spanish entered the Dominican Republic, and those that could speak the language had issues with the dialects. Additionally, Dominicans who were proficient in English had problems trying to understand the English US participants spoke, as well as the Spanish they were speaking (Bloom, 2014). An example of this technical level was identified when the author observed translingual literacy practices amongst healthcare workers. An example of the philosophical level emerged when the author synthesized patient/provider interactions and identified the non-English speaking healthcare professionals as key facilitators in building rapport and communicating information to patients. The ideals that emerged from this were, “participants developed a hybrid approach for the challenges of layered linguistic difference” (Bloom, 2014, p. 280). This model represented a translingual negotiation model for communicating back and forth between participants and thus a philosophical reasoning for the techniques (Bloom, 2014).

The GPT model assumes that communication problems emerge because the practitioners pursue several conflicting initiatives (Craig & Tracy, 1995). This model was used as a guiding framework for formulating research questions and guiding data collection. Doing so provided the researcher to uncover how the practice was comprised of the three levels; problem the practice addresses, techniques or strategies the practice

involves, and the situated ideals that involve the practice. After reviewing the GPT methodology, the researcher presents the first research question:

RQ1: What are the communication dilemmas associated with implementing the new legislative bill?

The following sections will review literature around key topics that emerged from the study. Topics around organizational communication strategies during change aim to support the remaining research question. This will provide the reader with the context needed to understand the complex nature of assessing government agencies.

Organizational Communication Strategies During Change

Examining literature around organizational communication during change provides context by highlighting the importance of effective communication strategies to support change. Understanding effective communicative strategies during change will be important to review because the agency should advocate to leadership for additional staff. What can be drawn from these literature findings is the agency should be cognizant in how they communicate decision making before and during the policy implementation process. According to literature, it will allow leadership to build trust with their employees and create an environment where change can be supported. Much of the communication change literature suggests leadership and mid-level management are critical to supporting change initiatives. Tanner and Otto (2016) examined how the role of communication and leadership personality effects the change process to create an effective change implementation. In this study, the authors focused on the quality of the

communication between employees and their supervisor or manager. Additionally, they investigated the meaning of established forms of communication like team meetings and employee appraisals to understand their importance to organizational change (Tanner & Otto, 2016).

Practical implications from this study demonstrated the need for management's support for change by taking ownership of the change, and providing enough resources and support for employees (Tanner & Otto, 2016). This signals to employees they are not responsible for the consequences and any negative outcomes related to the change initiative. According to this study, this is an important factor in creating a work environment where employees can feel equipped to handle a change within their organization (Tanner & Otto, 2016). Findings suggest managers should receive training in communication practices prior to implementation. This equips them with the skills to speak with their employees clearly and effectively. It also creates an open resource for employees to communicate with their boss or supervisor, rather than cause frustration due to a lack in communication (Tanner & Otto, 2016). Finally, managers need to go into a change implementation with the mindset that communicating at least some information around decision making is better than not communicating at all. This will allow for a transparent implementation and create an environment where employees can feel free to provide input.

Developing and maintaining trust between management and employees is also crucial during organizational change and effective communication practices can help support trust. Tucker et al. (2013) examined three different social accounts (causal,

ideological, and referential) to identify which account supports trust during a change initiative. Social accounts can be described as forms of communication and explanations an individual provides to another for the decisions and actions they made. Furthermore, by using this method of communication employees can understand the decision-making process of leadership from their point of view. Causal accounts identify “the internal and external forces that affect the organization and why they imply a need for change” (Tucker et al., 2013, p. 188). Through identifying these factors, strategy design for implementation has a purpose for the decisions being made, making them more visible to employees. Ideological accounts “address the values of change, in particular the underlying reason why managers want a change program and what they expect to gain from it” (Tucker et al., 2013, p. 188). Finally, referential accounts aim to “adjust the frame of reference the employee uses to evaluate the fairness of decisions” (Tucker et al., 2013, p. 188).

Results found causal and ideological accounts were strong predictors of the perceived employee success of a social account. This means to track the decision-making and actions of leadership these two accounts should be used for communication efforts. The author also found ideological accounts can help improve trust in leadership during change implementation and these accounts can explain how the change relates to the ongoing organizational goals and objectives. Ideological accounts also help support decision makers make the best changes because it allows employees to see the decision-making from the point of view from the employer (Tucker et al., 2013).

Additionally, the authors also found that referential accounts did not relate to trust and negatively related to social account success (Tucker et al., 2013). This means that leadership should avoid comparing themselves to other organizations and implementing change for sake of keeping up with new industry trends. This can create confusion among employee because it contradicts current practices and goals, which creates the perception that leadership lacks direction in steering the organization. Finally, managements should seriously consider the content of their messaging because not only will it make decision-making transparent, but employees will be aware of the external and internal factors their reasoning (Tucker et al., 2013). This clear communication around implementation will set a precedent for the agency to follow for other initiatives they plan to carry out as well.

Finally, key implications from this section of the literature review suggest communicative and supportive actions play a significant role in the success of a change like policy implementation. In Tucker et al. (2013), the way in which leadership explains their decision-making is an important success factor for change. Using communication that addresses the value of the change and why they are conducting an implementation created employee support. Managers should avoid using communication strategies that reference other organizations because it could confuse organizational values and long-term goals (Tucker et al., 2013).

Leadership should not hold the perspective that all communication is good communication. Other scholars in the organizational communication field have found that certain communication practices are more effective than others. For example, Lewis et al. (2006) provide several key communication recommendations for organizational

leadership that help support change. First, leadership should place an emphasis on employee participation and empowerment, providing the space to take ownership in the work related to the change implementation. Next, before starting a change implementation the organization should assess whether their culture is a culture of change. A work culture of change encourages thorough preparation and diffusion of ideas among employees, which in turn will allow for a work environment that is more open to change and innovation. Finally, Lewis et al. (2006) suggest emphasizing clear communication that asks for input from employees, utilizing stakeholder knowledge, and managing the style and content of communication plays a critical role in a successful change implementation (Lewis et al., 2006). Therefore, to assess how communication strategies support policy implementation as a practice, the researcher presents the following question:

RQ2: What communication strategies are used by employees to support the practice of policy implementation?

With this literature review, the researcher has identified key topics around this study and uncovered the stakes at hand. Change initiatives are a challenging process for many workplaces and especially difficult for government organizations because of limited staff resources and policy-laden operations. The following section will review how the researcher went about conducting the study and the analysis that followed interviews.

Methods

The goal of this study was to (a) compose a case study and communication intervention to using GPT, and (b) create a theory of the practice in legislative policy implications specific to the work practices related to this agency. The research site can be described as a government agency that administers and manages health insurance programs and retirement benefits for retired and active educators across the state. Given the nature of the ongoing pandemic, much of their work is carried out from home with a few critical staff working in office. Interviews were conducted over video conference call. By following a qualitative methodological approach, the researcher identified and assessed key insights provided by interviewees. The analysis of this data presents an opportunity to engage with employees in a way that can manage the communication dilemmas associated with legislative changes.

Participants and Recruitment Protocol

The researcher identified employees within the health benefits division of the agency involved with legislative policy work. The researcher recruited and interviewed a total of eight employees involved in the work streams related to the policy implementation. Participants ranged in levels of leadership and expertise. Four out of the eight participants worked under the communications and engagement area of the department. The other participants worked in analytics, legal counsel, operations, and project management. Four of the employees interviewed were in a managerial level with direct reports.

Once the researcher received IRB approval, participants were identified and contacted via work email where they were provided preliminary information about the study and if they would be willing to participate. Recipients of this invitation were given a summary of the study to provide context for what interview questions the researcher will ask. This allowed the participants to prepare answers to the questions they might be asked. Participants were asked to schedule an interview at a convenient time and of their choosing. Interviews began with a review of the consent documents and the researcher asked participants if they have any questions about the document. Participants who wanted more time to consider or are unsure of their participation were encouraged to defer participation.

Interview Data Collection Procedures

After consent procedures, a semi-structured interview took place following the protocol detailed in the previous section. Interviews were on average 37 minutes, with the shortest interview at 27 minutes and the longest at 47 minutes. Interviews were video-recorded, if participants permitted the audio and video recording element of the consent form. During the interview, participants were given a brief introduction about the researcher and the purpose of the project. Participants were then asked if they have any remaining questions or concerns related to the interview process and privacy. The researcher ensured privacy by informing participants their names will be de-identified during the transcription process. Once this protocol was completed, participants were asked a series of questions about their role at the agency, how long they have been

working there, whether they are working from home or in office, and if they manage a team of employees. Asking these questions provided the researcher context around the environment in which the employee operates in. Additionally, asking questions around where they work and if they manage employees provided the researcher information about whether there are disparities in workload between employees who work from home versus in office.

Once preliminary questions were completed, the interviewer asked questions about their work related to new legislative policy. Participants were asked questions around their role in the work stream, if they believe they have the technical expertise to complete tasks, and if they have support from other staff if they were to take time off. Asking these questions created space for the researcher to uncover any tension between the participant and work related to the implementation. Furthermore, participants were asked questions around how often they speak with coworkers, their supervisor or boss, and the format in which they communicate. These interview questions allowed the interviewer to identify any patterns between coworkers who do not communicate often versus those who do and if this influences their workload management related to the implementation process.

The subsequent set of example questions followed the three levels of GPT to identify and assess the communication practices used by employees at the agency. The first set, to address the problem level (Craig & Tracy, 1995), participants were asked what was working well regarding collaboration and communication within their work stream. Framing the question this way created space for the participant to answer and

provide examples of current practices and communication within their work stream. This question also created space for the participant to provide examples of what does not work well. Following this level, the interviewer asked how they manage the work within their work stream, which addressed the technical level of GPT (Craig & Tracy, 1995).

Answering this question allowed the interviewer in several cases to build on the technical level to address the third philosophical level of GPT (Craig & Tracy, 1995). To address the third level, the interviewer asked if their current strategy works and why do they think it will or will not work. This question was framed this way in accordance with GPT, Craig & Tracy (1995) note at this level the goal is to articulate the situated ideals so participants can orient themselves to work out practical solutions to the dilemmas they face within this work stream. Furthermore, the participant can reconstruct those ideals by interpreting, criticizing, and expanding on them (Craig & Tracy, 1995) The remainder of the interview questions followed this format in accordance of the three theoretical levels of GPT. At a metatheoretical level, the goal of these interview questions was to create a bridge between practice and empirical observation. This provided the researcher a rational reconstruction composed of idealized and rationalized practices within the agency that are in turn informed by practical theory.

Data Analysis Methods

Qualitative data analysis of interview transcripts followed Tracy (2020), taking an iterative phronetic approach. This approach allowed the researcher to switch between emergent assessments of the data and use of existing communication models,

explanations, and theories (Tracy, 2020). This approach also allowed the researcher to structure initial open coding by asking questions such as, “What are the data telling me?”, “What is it I want to know?”, and “What is the dialectical relationship between what the data are telling me and what I want to know?” (Tracy, 2020, p. 210). By asking these questions during the open coding process, the researcher focused and organized their study to craft a narrative that eventually matched the research questions. Before open coding began, the researcher first cleaned and organized transcript data by anonymizing identifying information that linked to the participant and corrected any discrepancies between the transcript and the audio. After this was completed, the transcripts were uploaded to Atlas.ti for preliminary analysis.

Preliminary analysis examined all the interview data presented and created a coding scheme using in vivo codes and codes created by the researcher. In vivo codes used the language and terms used by the participants in the interviews (Strauss, 1987). Many of the codes created during open coding were first-level codes, codes that are descriptive and show the basic activities and work processes in the transcripts (Charmaz et al, 2018). Throughout this process, the researcher assessed whether there was a story emerging from the data (Weick, 2001). Given the difference in the responses provided by participants and the amount of available time, the researcher ensured to capture the essence of the transcripts by casting a wide net (Tracy, 2020). Doing so simplified the hierarchical coding process and enriched the detail of the coding quality. For example, communication was a general theme that emerged during many conversations. To capture a wide net of perspectives, the researcher created a total of 115 codes for this code group.

After primary-cycle coding was completed, the researcher shifted to hierarchical coding where second-level codes were created. Second-level codes explain, theorize, and synthesize emerging themes and concepts from the data (Tracy, 2020). Following Tracy (2020), hierarchical coding grouped together codes that were fractured during open coding and placed them under a hierarchical “umbrella” category.

Throughout the coding process, the researcher kept a journal of analytic memos to help capture the emerging analysis of the interview transcripts. These memos were an important part the analysis process because it allowed the researcher to first write freely about the emerging themes, and then think about what was written (Tracy, 2020). Writing memos also allowed the researcher to explain the codes created, how it relates to other codes, and how they connect to the research questions. These memos proved to be invaluable during analysis, below is an excerpt:

After completing a loose analysis outline draft, I think there are a few communication dilemmas that are observed in the agency that match my research questions. Managing feedback is a theme that cuts across almost all my interview transcripts. Whether it be feedback from the operations team about incorporating specific language on a letter or feedback from analytics about how to create data reporting that is useful and not just “reporting large amounts of information”.

The passage above was a key moment where the researcher made the connection from the codes to the research questions. This aided the researcher in formulating the findings section. Another crucial analysis method used was the loose analysis outline, an outline that highlights the research questions and the ways in which the codes connect with them

(Tracy, 2020). This assisted the researcher in validating the quality of the study and narrow the analysis to the essential codes. After this was completed, the researcher began drafting preliminary research findings.

Findings

Following the GPT framework, the focus of the researcher's RQs were to identify the dilemmas associated with new legislative bill implementation at the agency. After completing iterative rounds of qualitative analysis, five problems emerged focused on managing feedback between employees, conflicting perspectives between stakeholders, and staff resources. Current work strategies identified during interviews suggest ways in which employees at the agency manage these dilemmas. These strategies were streamlining meetings, creating process documentation, and hiring additional staff in the data analytics department. Other strategies were identified such as utilizing technology for cross-functional collaboration, and to communicate with other teams in the agency.

Communication Dilemmas

RQ1: What are the communication dilemmas associated with implementing the new legislative bill?

The key dilemmas focused on conflicting initiatives and perspectives between department areas and stakeholders. This friction of different perspectives is a result of the collaborative nature of policy implementation because it requires input from different teams either within the agency or from their insurance vendor. Collaboration was necessary to policy implementation because many of the teams involved need to review information released to the public or to the legislature. An instance of this friction occurred when the agency reviewed benefit information materials to send out to their members. This information was critical because it informed members about key changes

to the program and their benefits. Therefore, striking a balance between providing information to members that is accurate, yet accessible was important because the population may be confused and or angered if unclear. One passage from an engagement employee illustrates the complexity behind their messaging when creating a mailing:

Then we're working with our operations team to really carefully...Use the wording that is goes into that letter. So, one of the key things was that when drafting this, we did not say "you are receiving this letter because *you are eligible* for this one-time reenrollment" we made sure we tweak it in a way for it to read. As "you *may be* eligible" so that we would not like run into any. And this was an insight which was given to us by the operations team. That way, if you say you are eligible, we mean. We might run into an issue where they'd be like, "well, you told me you are eligible and now you're telling me we're not eligible". So, we had to word it in a way that we that kind of steered away from that.

This quote showed how sensitive the public messaging was. The friction occurred when the operations team wanted accuracy, where the engagement team wanted accessibility. This comment illustrated the added layer of detail employees must vet when reviewing public messaging. Without this level of detail, stakeholders would call the agency, specifically the operations area, about questions regarding their eligibility. If employees handling member complaints and questions were not informed about the benefit changes and the specific wording in the letter, it could affect overall retention.

A similar dilemma also emerged when speaking to another engagement employee about drafting messaging in coordination with the government relations team:

I'm still kind of figuring out what how they like to communicate. Just like for instance, I gave them the district leader materials and they said, "well, we're going to redo this so that it's more ledge friendly". So, I don't know what ledge friendly means, but we still get asked by the legislature or associations what's going on. They're hearing noise from their constituents from districts. Retirees also have lots of time on their hands and make their make their opinions known and a lot of times it's misunderstanding. So, we have to educate our internal stakeholders. Make sure that government relations, make sure that our executive leadership, as well who talked to the legislature, that they all understand what we're doing.

Based on other interview conversations, this issue of being perceived as too persuasive or "lobbying" makes messaging especially difficult because if the agency was perceived by the government relations team as lobbying, it is possible they would receive criticism from the legislature. The friction that occurred from this instance was when the government relations teams wants messaging that won't be perceived as persuasive and the engagement teams prefers accuracy to appropriately inform the public. Therefore, highlighting problem of creating public information that was more "ledge friendly".

The issue of lobbying also emerged when speaking with an analytics employee, he noted when communicating program changes to the public, the agency likes to communicate in way that's clear and as accurate as possible. However, the caveat is that messaging won't be as "persuasive or as clear" as the department would like it to be. According to the analytics employee, this created a paradox between the legislature and the agency in which neither party can agree on what is best for the agency. The example

of participating organizations offering competing coverage surfaced, where the agency presented to the legislature that this competition is financially bad for their active employee health insurance program. Ideally, the agency would like to have all organizations required to participate because it would create a program that is cost-effective and provides the “greatest societal benefit.” However, during a Legislative session the topic came up and legislators argued that not allowing organizations a choice to leave the program or offer competing coverage would make stakeholders angry, and therefore should have the option to do so. The result of this session was that stakeholders could leave, but they were to be locked out of the program for a set amount of years. This negotiation between the two parties demonstrated how a lack of consensus affects the work of the agency, creating new streams of work.

Other dilemmas were observed within the analytics team. When speaking with the analytics employee, problems emerged between the agency and a health system when partnering to work on communicating claims data to agency leadership. The following quote illustrates this problem:

There's a lot of people that participate in that workgroup from the agencies, and some of the agencies are much larger than the agency and it can be difficult to build like consensus or momentum around what you did next. And so, I try to makes suggestions for the group on how to keep the projects going to make an impact, so sometimes we'll just be in a meeting. And somebody else just present a bunch of data slides. So, I'm like, “OK, but what do we do with this information? Like what's the next step?”

A challenge will be translating the information into initiatives that make an impact. So, the general problem I see. Or it's a common trap for people working with data is to collect large amounts information and report larger amounts of information, but not put it into a context that's useful for decision making.

The dilemma occurred when the health system wanted to report a large amount of data to leadership versus the analytics manger, who wanted a focused approach to claims reporting. The analytics employee believes this to be part of a larger societal issue in that due to the complexity of the tools we're using and that "the tools that we use are so large that they kind of outstrip peoples' natural ability to function within them...". Claims reporting is important for the agency because it informs agency leadership about the health of their member population. With this information, the agency can make informed decisions around public messaging and future policy initiatives.

Conflicting perspectives also emerged between employees and their insurance vendor. Their insurance vendor is responsible for much of the agency's day-to-day work that aims support their member population. The focus of this problem occurred between the insurance vendor and the engagement team. A key passage from a communications representative provided context of a common dilemma:

The problem I would say with designers at a big corporation like that is that they're just people that are proficient at using the tools. They aren't necessarily creatives...Like it's people that are because, you know, corporations like that don't really change up there look and feel.

An example of this problem occurred when the department was working on launching a campaign concept for that upcoming plan year. According to the communications representative, the problem was the insurance vendor sent back concept ideas that “looked exactly like everything else we typically put out...”. Furthermore, when the department came back with feedback, the insurance vendor was confused as to why they were dissatisfied with their campaign concept ideas. What the department ended up doing was reaching out to their only in-house designer for concepts and using their ideas for the campaign. This dilemma exemplifies the agency and the insurance vendor not on the same page. The agency wanted new ideas to keep their image and public outreach interesting and engaging, whereas the insurance vendor reverted to the status quo.

Another dilemma between the department and the insurance vendor emerged when speaking with the communications representative about managing projects:

I would say that the insurance vendor team will sometimes get a little like they'll just be focused on maybe something that we've talked about months ago rather than pivoting themselves to like deal with something that's come up between then...They don't necessarily look at things through a strict like. They try to look at things through strategic lens and I think sometimes they fall flat.

An instance occurred when the engagement team developed a formal email message to district leadership to bolster the agency and amplify the value they bring to stakeholders. In the past, the insurance vendor typically helped create these messages and provide strategic input, however, the department had to create these messages. Additionally, the

department also had to inform the insurance vendor what emails were needed from them, with the initial expectation of relying on them for this type of work.

During analysis, it became evident that conflicting perspectives and ideas between departments and stakeholders created dilemmas for the agency. For example, the insurance vendor is contracted to serve as support to the agency for creating member materials and communications, and act as a representative of the agency when attending conferences. However, due to the ever-changing nature of the agency's work, it became difficult for the insurance vendor to stay updated on events occurring in the agency. Thus, ultimately impacting their work. This is because changes from the legislature occur frequently and impact the focus of staff resources. Therefore, much of the day-to-tasks assigned to the insurance agency often competed with more urgent legislative work.

Many of the employees at the agency feel there should be additional staff to address the work associated with their roles. A project manager within the department indicated that "requesting to have additional staff" would help address some of the workload management issues facing the agency. Additionally, the project manager explicitly stated, "another project manager" would help as well because "I have 80 hours of work for one project manager." According to them, hiring an additional project manager would help because you could have more people dedicated to specific projects and tasks, instead of one person taking on all the responsibility. Ideally, to address the insurance vendor dilemma, the agency could have a dedicated project manager assigned to work with the insurance vendor, rather than having managers update them. This could

potentially solve for the time-consuming issues of updating and coordinating work between the two.

Other employees, indicated additional staff would help because “we have other full time day jobs” as they “...continue to grapple with the volume of work.” Based on this assessment, employees at this agency could use communicative action to navigate these dilemmas. The following section will detail the strategies identified during data analysis that are used by employees to support policy implementation.

Current Work and Communication Strategies

RQ2: What communication strategies and practices are used by employees to support the practice of policy implementation?

To manage policy implementation, the agency has a set of strategies in place created after previous implementation efforts. Strategies included meeting efficiency, clear process documentation, hiring additional staff, and team collaboration. Meeting efficiency emerged as a central strategy identified by several employees within the agency. Meeting efficiency could mean different things to different organizations. That is why when discussing how the analytics team could stand up a policy project within a short timeframe, the analytics employee stated, “We don't rely on meetings to get work done typically...we try to embrace...like the full remote nature of our work.” This quote illustrated from the agency’s perspective as to how they conducted effective meetings, completed the necessary work ahead of time in order talk about roadblocks, and captured other project updates.

The project manager provided insight into meeting conduct and ensuring the right project updates were communicated to each department “representative”. When it came to meeting conduct, she stated, “we’re also trying to be respectful of people’s time”, meaning adhering to the meeting agenda and the allotted time for each topic was crucial to project management. Additionally, the project manager indicated “capturing the updates ahead of time by department” and entering those project updates into a shared spreadsheet was an effective strategy. That way the meeting facilitator can read that update, relay it back to leadership, see if leadership has questions, and then ask those questions during the meeting based on the project update that was entered into the spreadsheet.

According to another employee, due to the remote nature of their work, most of their days are filled with meetings.

...when we went remote, it was like I don't just pop over to somebody's office and resolve a quick question like I just set up a call with them... There's a lot of stickiness on the calendar in terms of meetings.

To manage this and their workload she said it really comes down to “tailoring the meetings” so that they can be an effective use of everyone’s time. She also noted early in the policy implementation process there’s a lot “discovery”, meaning most of the time spent in meetings is figuring what needs to be done and who needs to do it. Therefore, managing this time effectively was critical in completing their policy work in a timely manner. To manage meeting dilemmas with the insurance vendor, they spoke to how issues around receiving meeting requests from the insurance vendor and how this creates

extra administrative work. They are currently in the process of testing out a new meeting request initiative where the insurance must fill out a meeting request form. This form was designed to help the agency understand the purpose of an ad hoc meeting, who was required to attend, and an agenda. Ultimately, this was to help administrative staff organize these meetings so the same questions are not repeated, and the insurance vendor takes on responsibility in meeting purpose and organization.

Clear process documentation emerged as a critical aspect of project management. Process documentation was characterized as having clear directions for how to proceed with new policy implementation. According to a long-time employee, when the agency had fewer staff resources, managing new policy implementation was difficult because there was limited documentation around decision making. Because of this, they noted gains were made with documenting their work. The analytics employee noted that having clear documentation also helped train new hires quickly so they are up to speed on policy implementation projects and explained why they have certain processes.

Hiring additional staff has also helped the agency address a technical gap in building administering the claims data warehouse. Specifically, hiring an employee with over 30 years of experience standing up data warehouses helped the data team build their warehouse in a short timeframe. Over time, the agency aimed to hire additional staff with a recent restructure and adding staff to their engagement team.

Using Microsoft Teams for project organization and management surfaced as a crucial strategy for the agency to manage policy implementation. Teams, allowed the agency to store documents, conduct review work, and manage edits from other

department areas. Specifically, Teams was cited by the engagement employee as an efficient way to organize feedback:

You can all put in your comments and your edits, and you can track changes so it's all in one place rather than you having to reconcile everyone else added, so I felt like that with technology (Teams) goes in our favor.

The alternative to Teams was managing projects over email where feedback from other departments would get lost, making it difficult to track projects. Additionally, the communications representative noted the efficacy of Teams when working with other department areas and their insurance vendor to put together a video. When drafting the script and providing edits, she highlighted how “having conversations in the actual document and having it in one consolidated document” was an important feature of organizing in Teams. Without this feature, she received the same document from multiple people, making the drafting and reviewing process “really messy”.

Another benefit of Teams was it allowed for transparency during the reviewing and editing process for policy implementation work. An engagement employee highlighted this:

I think having all of the subjects there so you know have. For different projects, like [REDACTED] and whoever's on that work stream can get all the messages, and then you can link to the to the materials and everybody is working off of one document, and so there's more transparency. It's well organized, it you can put the chat and right there on that same channel along with the file...

Furthermore, prior to the addition of Teams, the agency managed and stored projects on a shared drive with separate folders. This previous system did not work well because granting access to documents to individuals was a complicated process in that everyone had to go through IT to grant access. Along with this, there were issues with SharePoint files not syncing correctly and employees had access issues as well. However, with Teams the department does not have to go through IT to grant file access and users do not have to remote VPN access to get to documents.

An operations employee highlighted how Teams made for an efficient transition from the office to working from home at the beginning of the pandemic. She noted, "...I don't think I don't think we could have done it (the transition) without Microsoft Teams." Additionally, when collaborating with other teams in the agency, they said, that Teams was "prone to collaborate" in that she can ask five employees to provide input on one document, rather than merging comments from several other documents.

Other communication strategies emerged when speaking with the communications representative about what works well when collaborating with other teams in the agency. She describes when conducting work related to the agency website, it required her to work the web team to update content. However, when working with the web team she notes that "being very precise is important." This was because they are very technical people in that they need specifics and limited guess work. She provided an example of this strategy:

I'll do a lot of screenshots and like. When I need something inserted somewhere, I'll screenshot it. Make sure that there's a red line and point to it rather than just saying, "I need it here." I do a lot of visual cues for them...

And that goes as far to like if I want a web page formatted a certain way. I'll kind of like mimic that format in a Word document rather than just telling them like, "Hey, it's in this format," so that they know exactly where the content needs to go each time.

This was a proven strategy that worked well for this employee and was an example of how communication strategies can be utilized to complete work within the agency. The following section will discuss these strategies at the philosophical level for practice and will identify recommendations based on findings.

Discussion

This study utilized the metatheoretical framework of GPT to identify and assess the dilemmas involved to policy implementation and the strategies employees used to navigate them. Due to the changes new policies bring, they create dilemmas and frictions between employees, and their stakeholders. However, many of the dilemmas identified in this study could be resolved through communication. The researcher has identified theoretical implications for practice by examining five employee strategies used to support policy implementation. Additionally, the researcher has two recommendations for the agency that involve internal process consulting workshops, and advocating to leadership for additional project management staff.

Situated Ideals and Theoretical Implications

The situated ideals that emerged at the agency were accurate and accessible messaging, persuasive and legislature friendly messaging, making time for policy work, accountability and transparency, tradition and innovation, and quantity and contextualization of claims data reporting. That is, effective communication for policy implementation to be successful it should include these ideals. Employees in this study used five critical strategies to manage the problems for successful policy implementation to take place, marked by dilemmas that resulted from contradictions among ideals. The first ideal, accurate and accessible messaging, emerged when employees of different departments needed to create public-facing messaging. To manage this, it was crucial for the agency to sustain a collaborative work environment. This agency environment invited

employees to work and communicate together to navigate the influx of changes in the workplace. According to the agency, one aspect of effective collaboration involved clear and precise messaging that eliminated the guess work when working with other department areas. For example, the engagement employee highlighted this strategy when collaborating with the operations team. The engagement team wanted messaging that was accessible to the public, whereas the operations team wanted specific details. To manage this, Microsoft Teams (Teams) provided employees the ability to create public-facing messaging that balanced the ideal of accuracy and accessibility. This was due to the design features like working out of one single document, rather than tracking several different drafts. This communicative strategy also eliminated back and forth messaging between the two department areas, allowing them to complete their work in a timely manner.

Other instances of finding balance in messaging through collaboration were identified with the dilemma of perceived lobbying versus persuasive messaging. The ideal in this case was to create messaging that balanced persuasiveness, yet was legislator friendly. This presented a conflict between the government and engagement teams. The engagement team wanted slightly persuasive messaging to keep members in the program, however the government team viewed this as lobbying to the public, something that not permissible as an agency. To manage this, the term “ledge friendly” was used to create messaging that satisfies the needs from both teams. Additional design features in Teams like instant messaging, document storage, and creating channels for project teams all served as important features to support team collaboration during policy implementation.

Second, meeting efficiency was another aspect of effective policy implementation. Ideally, the agency would like to make enough time on their day to complete the time sensitive policy work. However, due to the remote nature of their work, their days are often filled with meetings. To manage this, effective meetings strategies were outlined by the project manager like: capturing project updates ahead of the meeting and adhering to the allotted time for each meeting topic. This allowed the project manager to conduct an effective meeting to keep project moving along their timeline. Other strategies included tailoring meeting topics to address the pressing demands at the time. For example, early in the policy implementation process was important to identifying ownership of specific tasks. By assigning these representatives early on, they take on long-term ownership of the policy project. These strategies were important because it freed up time for the managers and other employees, a crucial component to meeting project deadlines. Without these meeting strategies in place, most of their day at the agency would be filled with meetings. Other meeting strategies included creating an ad hoc meeting request forms that were used to address sudden meeting requests from the insurance vendor. These meeting requests were a problem for staff resources because it would also take up more time in their day, instead of focusing on more pressing policy work.

This led to a third ideal, accountability and transparency. According to the agency, accountability means taking ownership of assigned projects. Transparency means ensuring employees complete their work in a timely manner by tracking their contributions to project work. This ideal was cited by the engagement team as important

to moving policy projects along to meet deadlines. Employees sense of accountability was important especially for management to then report project updates to leadership. The design features built into Teams provided employees at the agency the tools to manage this. Features like tracking edits made completing document review work easy for accountability and transparency. Whenever a user made an edit to a document, their name and contact info was attached to the edits. This made it easy to not only contact the individual, but from a management perspective they could identify who completed their work. This editing feature was needed because of employees' different areas of expertise. Without these features, it would create more work by contacting and reminding specific employees to review and make their edits to a document.

Another ideal was policy implementation processes and ideas that balance innovation and tradition. This presented a fourth strategy, clear process documentation. Because of previous challenges with implementation such as project delegation and incorporation of new campaign ideas, managerial staff created clearer documentation on how best to proceed with completing policy projects. This provided employees the base knowledge and best practices to ensure uniformity across projects. This strategy parallels Leonardi's (2015) fourth characteristic of a work practice because it was historically influenced and individuals refer to this documentation to act consistently when under new policy implementation.

Finally, data reporting should be contextualized and capture the quantity of claims reporting. To manage this, the agency has expanded staff resources and restructured to fit staff within the analytics department to support this ideal. Specifically, hiring two

additional staff within the department created more capacity to support the data warehouse and claims reporting needs. By expanding these resources, managerial staff could focus their attention on managing policy implementation work.

Recommendations

The agency and its stakeholders should first come to the collective recognition that the dilemmas identified in this study exist within the organization. This will provide them the possibility of addressing the several frictions between departments and the insurance vendor. For example, the government and engagement teams could partake in a joint workshop to define messaging boundaries that would fall under legislature friendly messaging. This workshop session could either be facilitated by leadership or a process consulting team. Process consulting (PC) emphasizes the process, examining how and what things are done between groups of people. The benefit of PC is it will allow the agency to act on the implementation process as it occurs internally and externally, thus allowing them to take ownership of definitions (rather than a consultant) to improve the situation. PC typically takes place at the start of an organizational learning effort and activities like workshops are important part of change efforts. Through the workshop exercise, the agency and consulting team will go through a joint diagnosis, reflecting on the dilemmas identified in this study (Schein, 1999).

The goal of this exercise is to assist agency leadership to help diagnosis and confirm these dilemmas, and develop an action plan based on them. Central to the PC ideology is the dilemmas will stay solved longer if the agency learns to solve the

dilemmas themselves (Schein, 1999). Additionally, PC is designed to create a collaborative environment between the agency and the consulting team, and foster double-loop learning to promote capacity building. Double-loop learning can be specified for leadership to allow them to examine and experiment with their action plans, while assessing the actions in practice (Argyris, 1993). However, the agency should be careful with a consulting team making structural level interventions and changes because they have a higher potential for employee resistance (Schein, 1999). Therefore, if the agency decides to proceed with PC-style workshops, they should ensure they are fostering a strong relationship between the consulting team and employees. Building a relationship between the two teams takes time and trust. Strong inter-team relationships also have the capability of leading to higher performance levels in teams (Hempel et al, 2009). Therefore, conducting the PC workshops will provide an enriched learning experience in which the agency can address the dilemmas brought on by new policy implementation. There is also benefit to interacting with other employees because it allows dialogue to form on how to manage the contradictions between public facing and leadership focused messaging. (Canary, 2010).

Second, the agency should seek to advocate to leadership for additional project management staff. Advocacy is a communicative action that seeks to make ideas from individuals viable and persuade those in a leadership to act on the idea. For advocacy to be successful depends on two factors: the quality of the idea and the effectiveness of the advocacy (Daly, 2011). Communicating ideas to others (especially to leadership in organizational contexts) is a crucial aspect of instilling them into practice. To make the

idea worth remembering in conversations with leadership should be lean and efficacious, as well as restating the key aspects in alternative ways either offering different examples of the idea and engaging visuals. For example, visuals that are effective should match how leadership thinks (Daly, 2011). In the context of this agency, providing a graphic that shows the increase in hours worked on policy implementation would coincide with the idea of hiring additional staff. Additionally, successful visual advocacy involves participation from leadership (Daly, 2011). Placing leadership in the position of project management staff could provide them the perspective of how much work is involved with policy implementation. Doing so could make the idea viable to leadership, causing them to act on hiring additional staff. By having this additional staff in place to support cross-functional collaboration, managerial staff can be alleviated directly managing policy implementation projects. This could not only will save on costs by potentially removing the insurance vendor from day-to-day tasks, but can also create an agency-centric workforce that does not rely on corporate contracts.

Practical Implications

Implications from this study suggest government organizations have ongoing challenges related to legislation constantly being passed. This placed the agencies in a constant state of fluctuation, impacting their staff resources and public services. Constant change proved to place a strain on how this agency conducts operations and communicates with the public and stakeholders. This strain involved frictions between departments and stakeholders when developing public messaging. Therefore, recognizing

these dilemmas is the first step to ensuring that all department levels are on the same page and cognizant of the problems other areas are experiencing. However, as this study points out, communication strategies are critical to managing the conflicts and dilemmas associated with policy implementation. By using the strategies identified in this study, other organizations can leverage this into action and support policy changes.

This study also highlighted the importance of collaborative technology like Microsoft Teams. Teams made it easy for this agency to not only support remote work operations, but it was a technology all employees agreed was useful and critical to completing their work. For organizations undergoing a change initiative, they should ensure there is some form of collaborative technology like Microsoft Teams in place. This collaborative technology proved to ease extra work and create better project organization, all essential aspects of implementing a successful change initiative.

Limitations

Throughout the completion of this study, there were several limitations identified. First, a small sample size of eight employees were interviewed. This made it difficult to assess the scale of the conflicts identified by employees in interviews. Because these conflicts were experienced by managerial staff, does not implicate they were experienced by support staff. Having this perspective would have been useful to address the severity of the conflicts within the agency. Additionally, because the insurance vendor was identified by participants as a source of conflict, it would have been useful to interview a vendor representative to gain their insight into the conflict.

Due to workplace policies around outside individuals attending agency meetings, the researcher was unable to attend and observe meetings. This made it difficult to observe work practices in action and identify any other conflicts that might emerge from meetings. According to Tracy (2020), without field notes to support interviews, the strength and empirical quality of the study can be impacted. In addition, the remote nature of their office environment made it difficult to observe the nuances in work practices and immerse into the field of study. Being in the office could have provided different perspectives on the conflicts and work practices of the agency. Many employees during interviews were also hesitant to talk about things that were not going well. This made it difficult to assess the extent of communication dilemmas and perhaps any other underlying conflicts.

Conclusion

This study highlighted the importance of communicative strategies within organizations undergoing a change initiative like policy implementation. With this study, by recognizing the dilemmas that come with the changes of policy implementation should the agency mediate inter-departmental conflicts. Additionally, by using advocacy as a communicative strategy the agency can vie for additional project management staff. Organizations reading this study can learn that change is constant and to mediate the problems they should look to using communication. They should also reassess the technology in place because this study highlights the importance of having a collaborative tool in place like Microsoft Teams to complete work. Therefore, organizations should understand that challenges with change happens across the board, whether at a government agency or a small brick and mortar store, communication is a theme that cuts across it all in solving problems.

Appendix

Interview Protocol

- 1) In a few words describe your role at [NAME REDACTED]?
- 2) How long have you been working at [NAME REDACTED]?
- 3) Do you currently work at home or in the office? Or both?
- 4) Do you manage a team of employees?
 - a) If so, how many employees do you manage?
- 5) In a few words describe you're a typical day for you at [NAME REDACTED]
 - a) Can you talk about a few of your main responsibilities as a [JOB TITLE]?
 - b) Do you have the background and technical expertise you need?
 - i) If you feel that you don't, does [NAME REDACTED] encourage training?
 - ii) How might you speak with your boss/supervisor about acquiring the necessary training?
- 6) Could you describe your work related to [NAME REDACTED]?
 - a) What workstream are you a part of?
 - i) Do you feel that you have technical expertise to complete this work?
 - ii) If you don't, how do you communicate this to your boss/supervisor?
 - iii) Do you have staff that could support you in this workstream if you were to take time off?
 - b) How often do you speak with your coworkers?
 - c) How often do you speak with your boss/supervisor?
 - d) What is the format in which you communicate? Meetings? Offline?
- 7) What's working well as you think about your collaboration and communication in this workstream?
 - a) How do you manage that?
 - b) Does that strategy work? Why do you think it works or not?
- 8) What's not working as well?

- a) How do you manage that?
 - b) Does that strategy work? Why do you think it works?
- 9) One thing I've heard is that the policy change has added work to everyone's desks. Has that been your experience?
- a) Does [NAME REDACTED] create any extra work for you outside of your day-to-day?
 - b) How do you communicate to others about your workload?
 - c) Do you feel that you have the resources to complete you tasks efficiently and on time? If not, why not? If yes, why?
 - d) How do you cope with the added work?
 - i) How do you communicate to coworkers about workload?
 - ii) Do you perceive them to be receptive to your concerns related to workload?
 - iii) Do you communicate to your boss/supervisor about work overload? If so, how do these conversations carry out?
- 10) What do you think would be the ideal outcome for the implementation of [NAME REDACTED]?

Hierarchical Coding Sample

☉ Interview

Content:

| but it may not be as persuasive or as clear.

1 Codes:

- **Comm: Dilemmas**

Groups:

◇ Communication ◇ Dilemmas ◇ RQ1

☉ Interview

Content:

| we're just so busy like it's really in terms of resources

1 Codes:

- **Effects: Dilemmas**

Groups:

◇ Dilemmas ◇ Effects of bills ◇ RQ1

☉ Interview

Content:

| people get frustrated with being in a lot of meetings

1 Codes:

- **MTG: Dilemmas**

Groups:

◇ Dilemmas ◇ Meetings ◇ RQ1

Below are a few sample coding schemes used to support RQ2:

☉ Interview

Content:

| We don't rely on meetings to get work done

1 Codes:

- **MTG: practice**

Groups:

- ◇ Meetings ◇ Project Management ◇ RQ2
-

☰ **Interview**

Content:

| capturing the updates ahead of time

1 Codes:

- **MTG: practice**

Groups:

- ◇ Meetings ◇ Project Management ◇ RQ2
-

☰ **Interview**

Content:

| if you're requesting an ad hoc meeting, I can assign you this template. If you're interested we wanna know what's the purpose of the meeting, like what's the desired outcome, who is required, who can be copied, who is providing the agenda? Is this like hybrid? Is it in person? You know like we basically created like a like a the form they need to fill out

1 Codes:

- **MTG: practice**

Groups:

- ◇ Meetings ◇ Project Management ◇ RQ2

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