

Reflections on Street Level Bureaucracy

Professor Michael Lipsky, Demos, Georgetown Public Policy Institute

Schooling, public safety, and a wide range of social welfare policies are implemented only when they are delivered by front-line workers in interactions with citizens. Because these “street-level bureaucrats” can and must carry out their work with a degree of autonomy, their responses to various work challenges are critical and often separate determinants of public policies as they are actually experienced. These public policies are critical to sustaining a prosperous and inclusive society, and are essential to public trust in government. These propositions were originally developed by Michael Lipsky in his 1980 book, ‘Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services’. Now, on the 30th Anniversary of publication and in preparation for an expanded edition, Prof. Lipsky will offer reflections on the uses of the concept of “street-level bureaucracy” over the intervening period, and on the ongoing issues presented by street-level bureaucrats for effective policy implementation’.

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