



Rethinking Policy Design: Integrating Traditional, Market-oriented and Corporatist Career Management Policy Instruments across South African Public Service Departments



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ABSTRACT

Policy design gained popularity in the 1970s, thus proliferating extensive scholarly research within the field. This persistent trajectory is sustained by a significant emphasis on integrating diverse instruments within contemporary democratic and governance contexts. Despite the relevance of instrument mix, the integration of traditional, corporatist, and market-oriented policy instruments still needs to be explored in the African context, particularly in career management. This study addressed this gap by investigating the integration of these diverse paradigms through insights from the metaphysical foundations of governance models alongside the empirical data gathered from the stakeholders at the North West Province Departments of Cooperative Governance Traditional Affairs and Human Settlements. Findings revealed a divergence of policy design approaches, culminating in the misalignment of policy instruments in career management. This misalignment hampers the integration of employee development objectives with Public Service goals. Findings revealed that the underlying cause of this deficiency is the misalignment of NATO instruments. Therefore key stakeholders in both departments should realign policy instruments and enhance targeted capability building. The study contributes to public administration theory, policy design, career management, and integrative governance by prioritising the alignment of policy instruments, thereby bridging the gap between organisational and employee developmental goals. This collaborative approach reveals the potentiality of integrative governance in harmonising diverse policy instruments in public organisations.

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INTRODUCTION

Policy design gained popularity and prompted extensive scholarly research from the 1970s to the early 1990s but later declined in the late 1990s due to governance studies sidelining traditional design considerations over market-oriented or corporatist instruments.¹ Despite this decline, policy design resurged through policy mixes.² Eminent scholars, including Malcolm Goggin, John Dryzek, Hans Bressers, Helen Ingram, Anne Schneider, G.B. Doern, Stephen Linder, B. Guy Peters, Renate Mayntz,

¹ Michael Howlett, "From the 'Old' to the 'New' Policy Design: Design Thinking beyond Markets and Collaborative Governance," *Policy Sciences* 47 (2014): 187.

² Gilberto Capano and Michael Howlett, "Causal Logics and Mechanisms in Policy Design: How and Why Adopting a Mechanistic Perspective Can Improve Policy Design," *Public Policy and Administration* 36, no. 2 (2021): 141–62.

Christopher Hood, Evert Vedung, Peter May, Frans van Nispen, Michael and Trebilock, and Michael Howlett, duly acknowledge this trajectory within their respective contributions. These scholars laid an unprecedented foundation on critical traditional considerations, market, and network instruments in policy design. Linder and Peters emphasised that the essence of design lies in integrating values, causation models and instrument selection in facilitating improved decision-making by handling biases from stakeholder interventions and the mismatch of instruments.³ Conversely, governance studies' preference for market-oriented or corporatist instruments led to the recognition that complex interactions among diverse stakeholders shape policy outcomes, challenging exclusive government design.⁴

Preserving these precepts involves tracing the paradigmatic shift of policy design from the 1970s, as spurred by pioneering policy science seminal works of Harold Lasswell, where in his approach, Lasswell emphasised the significance of policy instruments and decisions during the formulation stage in shaping policy outcomes.⁵ Harold Lasswell primed other policy scholars to study various approaches to assist the government in effecting policy.⁶ Bardach,⁷ and Salamon echoed Lasswell's sentiments by advocating a paradigm shift in policy studies, urging a reorientation towards analysing policy instruments like incentives and regulations rather than disparate areas, as these lead to focusing on the wrong unit of analysis.⁸ Salamon established a "tools approach" seminal framework emphasising the importance of meticulously categorising policy instruments to facilitate a nuanced analysis of their utilisation.⁹ Thus significantly contributing to the prominence of the "tools approach" within policy studies and enriching the field of policy sciences by emphasising the examination of policy outputs,¹⁰ which included both traditional 'substantive' tools such as regulation and public ownership and more 'procedural' ones including the use of advisory commissions and public participation exercises. This background led to Christopher Hood's classification of policy instruments. Notably, the NATO state's resources (nodality, authority, treasure, and organisation) became the most widely recognised frameworks in policy design.¹¹ This unprecedented foundation prompted this study to undertake the impact of instrument mixes.¹² Career management transition from singular tools towards how the collaboration of various policy instruments can integrate career management policy aims, goals, multilevel methods, and state resources instruments.¹³ Explicitly, Howlett, et.al. and Capano and Howlett contend that instrument mixes can integrate various kinds of market-based, hierarchical, and network policy tools, thereby prompting further investigations into expounding the significance of collaborating various conflicting career management policy instruments and comprehending the complexity of integrating multiple organisational and individual policy goals which are presently hierarchical and in competition.¹⁴

The article argues that the failure to integrate traditional design considerations with market or corporatist policy instruments hinders the comprehensive resolution of complexities associated with career management policy challenges, leading to disparities between the development of employees and organisational goals reflecting the misalignment in calibrating policy instruments between achieving individual employees' and public service goals. The aforementioned sheds light on incongruencies within

³ Stephen H. Linder and B. Guy Peters, "From Social Theory to Policy Design," *Journal of Public Policy* 4, no. 3 (1984): 237–59.

⁴ Michael Howlett and Raul P Lejano, "Tales from the Crypt: The Rise and Fall (and Rebirth?) Of Policy Design," *Administration & Society* 45, no. 3 (2013): 357–81.

⁵ Howlett, "From the 'Old' to the 'New' Policy Design: Design Thinking beyond Markets and Collaborative Governance."

⁶ Howlett and Lejano, "Tales from the Crypt: The Rise and Fall (and Rebirth?) Of Policy Design."

⁷ Eugene S Bardach, *Implementation Studies and the Study of Implements* (Graduate School of Public Policy, University of California, Berkeley, 1980).

⁸ Lester M. Salamon, "Rethinking Public Management: Third-Party Government and the Changing Forms of Government Action," *Public Policy* 29, no. 3 (1981): 255–75, 256..

⁹ Salamon, "Rethinking Public Management: Third-Party Government and the Changing Forms of Government Action."

¹⁰ Azad Singh Bali, Michael Howlett, and M Ramesh, "Unpacking Policy Portfolios: Primary and Secondary Aspects of Tool Use in Policy Mixes," *Journal of Asian Public Policy* 15, no. 3 (2022): 321–37; Howlett and Lejano, "Tales from the Crypt: The Rise and Fall (and Rebirth?) Of Policy Design."

¹¹ C. Hood, *The Tools of Government* (Chatham: Chatham House Publishers, 1986).

¹² Capano and Howlett, "Causal Logics and Mechanisms in Policy Design: How and Why Adopting a Mechanistic Perspective Can Improve Policy Design."

¹³ Guillaume Fontaine, "Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Policy Design," in *International Joint Workshops on Public Policy. International Public Policy Association (IPPA)*, (University of Pittsburgh, Estados Unidos, 2018).

¹⁴ Capano and Howlett, "Causal Logics and Mechanisms in Policy Design: How and Why Adopting a Mechanistic Perspective Can Improve Policy Design"; Michael Howlett, Ishani Mukherjee, and Jun Jie Woo, "From Tools to Toolkits in Policy Design Studies: The New Design Orientation towards Policy Formulation Research," *Policy & Politics* 43, no. 2 (2015): 291–311, 300.

South Africa's public service departments, including the North West Province Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (NWDCOGTA) and North West Province Department of Human Settlements (NWPDHS), on the hierarchical and competitive organisational/employee challenges stemming from a lack of integration of policy instruments. Empirical findings echo these sentiments by reflecting that both departments are not achieving the desired outcomes because of a lack of balance between financial and organisational instruments, including unqualified candidates promoted without being skilled and inconsistent assessment practices by line managers,¹⁵ with authority instruments revealing non-compliance with legislative frameworks during the implementation process and unfaithful use of legislative frameworks by role players, revealing the disharmony and conflicts among NATO instruments.¹⁶ This disparity aligns with the persisting approximate 3.4 million inhabitants of the North West province experiencing poverty, unemployment, or inequality, culminating from housing shortages, substandard infrastructure, and poor living conditions.¹⁷ including the failure to attract and retain essential technicians and professional engineers. This failure further reinforces the need to address this gap as it indicates the inadequacies of career management instrument mixes.

Beneath this lack of policy instruments integration endeavour lies a rich tapestry of philosophical underpinnings shaping policy design frameworks, and exploring these metaphysical foundations provides crucial insights into comprehending policy design frameworks, the methodology followed, and the biases uncovered. By rethinking policy design, the study explores the selection and integration of these NATO policy instruments by integrating market-based, hierarchical and network principles and recommending a unified framework that preserves precepts of traditional policy design with corporatist and market-based perspectives by uniquely synthesising conflicting philosophical underpinnings of institutional, fragmentation and atomistic individual ontologies into integrative governance.¹⁸ Therefore, this article contributes to policy design, career management, and integrative governance by bridging the gap between organisational and employee goals, elucidating the ramifications of policy instrument misalignment, and robustly enhancing the policy mix discourse.

CONCEPTUALISING POLICY DESIGN

Policy design is a foundational framework for understanding the intricate processes and components of selecting and integrating policy instruments. Considerably, policy design studies have differentiated between procedural ("design-as-verb") and substantive aspects ("design-as-noun") of policy formulation.¹⁹ Revealing that policy design is a multifaceted approach, which requires the navigation of complexities in policy formulation to emphasise the process and the content-oriented dimensions of the field. Policy design further entails a specialised policy formulation informed by insights into the effects of policy tool use on policy targets while enabling the realisation of policy objectives.²⁰ This approach emphasises the policy formulation process and content-oriented dimensions, highlighting the indispensable nexus linking policy instruments, implementation, and formulation of policy ideas,²¹ contending the need for a comprehensive framework to examine policy tools and elements,²² which can

¹⁵ Republic of South Africa, "Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the Performance Management and Development System for the Public Service," 2018, https://www.psc.gov.za/documents/reports/2018/PMDS_Report_Final.pdf.

¹⁶ Hood, *The Tools of Government*.

¹⁷ North West Provincial Government, "Annual Report 2016/17. Financial Year. North West Department of Local Government and Human Settlements (NWPDLGHS)," 2017, 5; North West Provincial Government, *Annual Report: Final Year 2019/2020. North West Province Department of Cooperative Governance Traditional Affairs and Human Settlements (NWPDCOGTA)* (North West, 2020), 21; North West Provincial Government, *Annual Performance Plan. North West Province Department of Human Settlements (NWPDHS)* (North West, 2021), 15.

¹⁸ Hood, *The Tools of Government*; Capano and Howlett, "Causal Logics and Mechanisms in Policy Design: How and Why Adopting a Mechanistic Perspective Can Improve Policy Design"; Margaret Stout and Jeannine M Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance," *Administration & Society* 47, no. 4 (2015): 447–81; M. Stout, L.E. Tower, and M.G. Alkadry, "Reframing Workplace Spirituality to Reduce Career and Social Costs to Women," *Public Integrity* 17, no. 2 (2015): 143–64.

¹⁹ Howlett, Mukherjee, and Woo, "From Tools to Toolkits in Policy Design Studies: The New Design Orientation towards Policy Formulation Research," 2.

²⁰ Howlett, Mukherjee, and Woo, "From Tools to Toolkits in Policy Design Studies: The New Design Orientation towards Policy Formulation Research," 291.

²¹ Linder and Peters, "From Social Theory to Policy Design."

²² A. L. Schneider and H. Ingram, "Policy Design: Elements, Premises and Strategies," in *Policy Theory and Policy Evaluation: Concepts, Knowledge, Causes and Norms*, ed. S. S. Nagel (New York: Greenwood, 1990), 77–102.

influence career management policy decisions.²³ This contention crucially appreciates the significance of policy design in improving policy decisions, particularly in career management contexts, by underscoring the need to mitigate biases between individual career aspirations and public service performance goals in instrument selection because such biases are essential considerations within policy design.²⁴

The recognition of policy design as complex is vital in career management because of the inherent nested problems and efforts in aligning goals, expectations, and policy instruments within and across the field.²⁵ The democratic and governance literature further underscores this complexity by emphasising policy design as a deliberate activity conducted by the state and various policy actors to improve policymaking and outcomes through accurate anticipation of consequences and articulation of specific courses of action.²⁶ The rise of democratic literature led to a re-evaluation of policy design to focus on optimal tool combinations, the interplay between technical expertise and political ideologies, and institutional evolution.²⁷ Assessing how toolkits have progressed depends on the transformative trends discussed below.

TRANSFORMATIVE TRENDS IN POLICY DESIGN

Transformative trends are pivotal for reshaping policy mixes from traditional, corporatist, and market-oriented policy design frameworks and institutional dynamics, as presented in the diagram below.²⁸

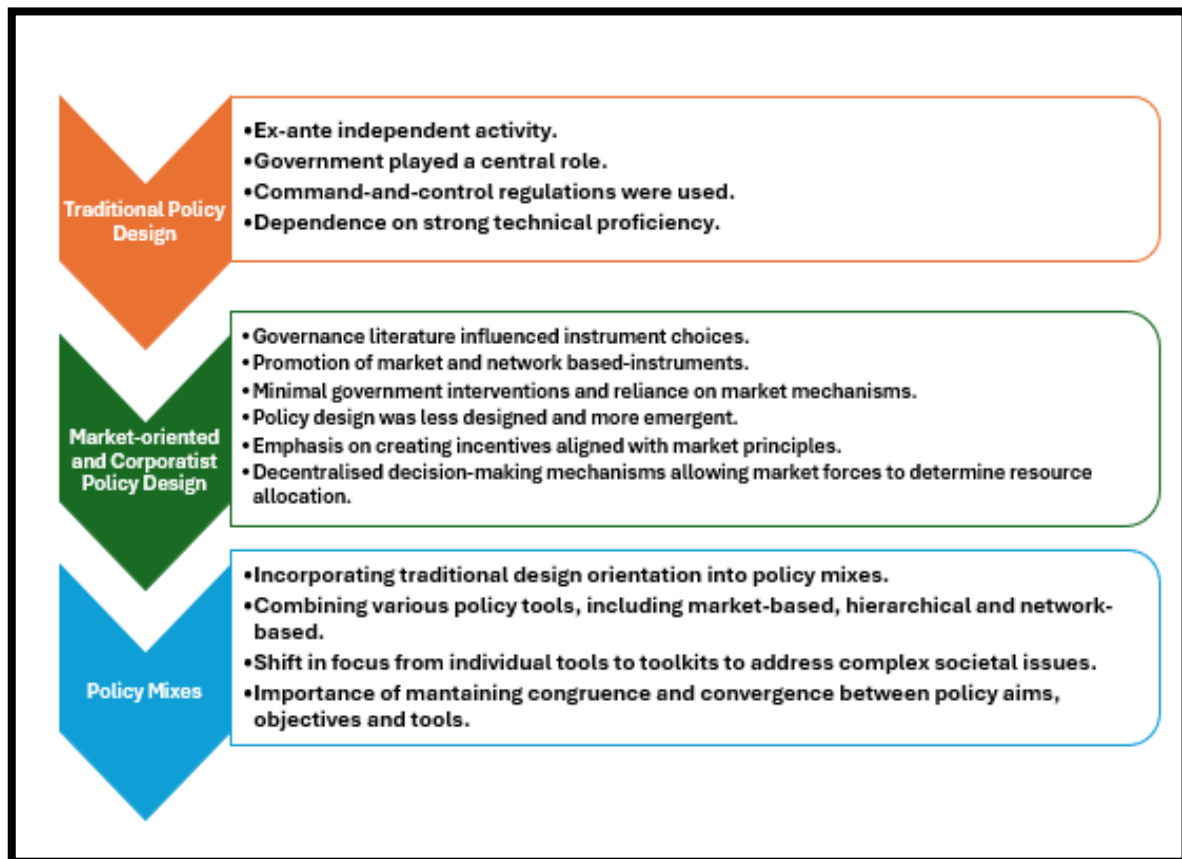


Figure 1: Transformative trends in policy design
Source: Author's construction

²³ Guillaume Fontaine, "The Contribution of Policy Design to Realist Evaluation," *Evaluation* 26, no. 3 (2020): 296–314; Schneider and Ingram, "Policy Design: Elements, Premises and Strategies"; Stephen H Linder and B Guy Peters, "A Design Perspective on Policy Implementation: The Fallacies of Misplaced Prescription," *Review of Policy Research* 6, no. 3 (1987): 459–75; John S Dryzek and Brian Ripley, "The Ambitions of Policy Design," *Review of Policy Research* 7, no. 4 (1988): 705–19.

²⁴ Fontaine, "The Contribution of Policy Design to Realist Evaluation."

²⁵ Dryzek and Ripley, "The Ambitions of Policy Design."

²⁶ Howlett and Lejano, "Tales from the Crypt: The Rise and Fall (and Rebirth?) of Policy Design."

²⁷ Howlett, "From the 'Old' to the 'New' Policy Design: Design Thinking beyond Markets and Collaborative Governance."

²⁸ Michael Howlett, "Governance Modes, Policy Regimes and Operational Plans: A Multi-Level Nested Model of Policy Instrument Choice and Policy Design," *Policy Sciences* 42 (2009): 73–89.

Figure 1 illustrates that *traditional policy design* represents an ex-ante independent activity, combining specific policy impacts with the practical capacity of the government to achieve predefined policy goals. The government plays a central role in delivering goods and services while employing centralised decision-making mechanisms to allocate resources and implement policy instruments to address various societal issues.²⁹ Command-and-control regulations and financial incentives like tax were prominent among the policy tools employed, with the government setting standards and ensuring compliance through monitoring and enforcement.³⁰ Leveraging financial incentives shaped behaviour and enabled the achievement of organisational performance objectives. Traditional policy design frameworks, characterised by their independence, excluded external factors such as political or personal interests from the formulation process, and successful implementation relied on technical proficiency and expertise among policy analysts.³¹ This autonomous approach fostered a focus on individual policy instruments and objectives within established governance structures and a predefined policy logic, thereby constraining the exploration of alternative approaches.³² Moreover, it assumed constrained yet flexible design spaces where policy packages could be comprehensively created from scratch.

Market-oriented and corporatist policy design frameworks illustrate the emergence of globalisation and governance literature, which highlighted the shifts which influenced instrument choices in the relationships among states, markets, and civil society organisations, favouring the latter two and reducing the need for extensive analysis of state-centric approaches.³³ During this period, extensive research promoted market and network-based instruments, often without considering their appropriateness or interaction with traditional policy design considerations. They aimed to align incentives with market principles, such as using tax incentives or removing regulatory barriers to stimulate innovation and competition. Policy tools resulted from decentralised processes involving public and private stakeholders. Decentralised decision-making allowed market forces to shape resource allocation, leading to less designed and more emergent approaches to policy. This era was marked by a dichotomy between market-oriented and state-centric approaches, resulting in the need for consideration of more instrument mixes and polarity in discussions between hierarchical, corporatist and market-based instruments.³⁴

Figure 1 also illustrates that *policy mixes* can integrate traditional design perspectives, which were overlooked by advocates of globalisation and governance alongside various market-based, hierarchical, and network policy tools.³⁵ This integrated approach transformed from individual tools towards toolkits or combinations of multiple tools to address societal challenges. Policy mixes recognise the necessity of an integration strategy that acknowledges the complexities of operating in a complex environment with conflicting values, intricate problems, distributed control, and unexpected developments initiated by human actors.³⁶ These factors challenge the alignment between policy aims, objectives, and targets, the consistency in implementation preferences and tool calibration.³⁷ This study explores how tool calibration can enhance the alignment between career management aims, objectives and targets. Comprehending the transformative trend enhanced the exploration of contrasting features of tradition, corporatist and market-oriented frameworks in influencing policy instrument mixes in addressing complex career management challenges, as discussed below.

²⁹ Howlett, "From the 'Old' to the 'New' Policy Design: Design Thinking beyond Markets and Collaborative Governance."

³⁰ Howlett, "From the 'Old' to the 'New' Policy Design: Design Thinking beyond Markets and Collaborative Governance."

³¹ Howlett, "From the 'Old' to the 'New' Policy Design: Design Thinking beyond Markets and Collaborative Governance."

³² Howlett, "From the 'Old' to the 'New' Policy Design: Design Thinking beyond Markets and Collaborative Governance."

³³ R. A. Rhodes, "The New Governance: Governing without Government," 2007; Jan Kooiman and Martijn Van Vliet, "Self-Governance as a Mode of Societal Governance," *Public Management and International Journal of Research and Theory* 2, no. 3 (2000): 359–78.

³⁴ Howlett, Mukherjee, and Woo, "From Tools to Toolkits in Policy Design Studies: The New Design Orientation towards Policy Formulation Research."

³⁵ Capano and Howlett, "Causal Logics and Mechanisms in Policy Design: How and Why Adopting a Mechanistic Perspective Can Improve Policy Design."

³⁶ Schneider and Ingram, "Policy Design: Elements, Premises and Strategies."

³⁷ Howlett, "Governance Modes, Policy Regimes and Operational Plans: A Multi-Level Nested Model of Policy Instrument Choice and Policy Design," 296.

POLICY INSTRUMENT MIXES IN CAREER MANAGEMENT

Howlett conceptualised policy instruments by considering perspectives from the U.S.A., U.K. and Canada.³⁸ Jordan, et.al., confirmed that only some theories can comprehensively explain policy instruments, including their impact on career management instrument choices.³⁹ Howlett delineated that policy instruments are various techniques available to governments for enacting public policy goals.⁴⁰ These instruments originate from Theodore Lowi's categorisation of policy types into distributive, regulatory, redistributive and constituent, based on their coercive nature.⁴¹ Although Lowi's typology presented challenges, it generated debates on policy instruments, leading to two prominent approaches: the resources and continuum approaches. The former includes fiscal or organisation resources at the disposal of the organisation, and the latter represents a decision point for governments during implementation- whether to utilise state or market instruments.⁴² This argument demonstrates the complexity of choosing policy instruments.⁴³

This study aligns with Hood's perspective on policy instruments, which adopts a resource-based approach. Hood suggests that the government encounters four essential resources: informational, financial, coercive, and organisational, hereafter referred to as NATO instruments (nodality, authority, treasure and organisation), which they utilise to monitor society or influence its actions.⁴⁴ In career management, authority instruments encompass policies and regulatory frameworks that prescribe governance methods, setting targets for implementation by public actors. These include, amongst others, the Constitution, H.R.M. policies, strategies, and regulatory frameworks related to career management, such as the Guide on the Practice of Career Management in the Public Service, 2011 and The White Paper on Human Resources Management, 1997. Treasure instruments involve financial resources like bursaries, retention funds, and performance-rated pay, which are particularly influential in career development. Nodality policy instruments aim to influence stakeholders' behaviour by providing information.⁴⁵ Organisation instruments involve stakeholders' relationships between public organisations and employees as they voluntarily change their behaviour.

The South African public service relies heavily on legislative frameworks (authority instruments) in career management. Even if regulations are prevalent in most career development initiatives, they are not mono-instrumental but instead seem to align more with increased coerciveness or compliance.⁴⁶ Additionally, there are market-based instruments, such as salary benchmarking, performance-based pay, market-demand analysis, flexible work arrangements, and recruitment and retention strategies tailored to market trends. Corporatist governance initiatives are evident in organisation instruments where there is a need for collaboration and coordination among stakeholders to enhance interdependence. Public service departments still need help integrating various policy tools, particularly in bridging the gap between individual goals and achieving public service objectives.⁴⁷ The problem may lie in using instruments to eradicate that gap. Since policy mixes stress the importance of utilising toolkits or a combination of tools to tackle societal challenges, combining and selecting NATO instruments is comprehensible by discussing insights from public policy.

³⁸ Michael Howlett, "Policy Instruments, Policy Styles, and Policy Implementation: National Approaches to Theories of Instrument Choice," *Policy Studies Journal* 19, no. 2 (1991).

³⁹ Andrew Jordan et al., "Environmental Policy: Governing by Multiple Policy Instruments," *Constructing a Policy State*, 2012, 104–24.

⁴⁰ Howlett, "Policy Instruments, Policy Styles, and Policy Implementation: National Approaches to Theories of Instrument Choice."

⁴¹ Theodore J. Lowi, "Distribution, Regulation, Redistribution: The Functions of Government," *Public Policies and Their Politics: Techniques of Government Control* 1966 (1966): 27–40, 27.

⁴² Howlett, "Policy Instruments, Policy Styles, and Policy Implementation: National Approaches to Theories of Instrument Choice."

⁴³ Jordan et al., "Environmental Policy: Governing by Multiple Policy Instruments."

⁴⁴ Hood, *The Tools of Government*.

⁴⁵ Michael Howlett and Mishra Ramesh, "Policy Subsystem Configurations and Policy Change: Operationalizing the Postpositivist Analysis of the Politics of the Policy Process," *Policy Studies Journal* 26, no. 3 (1998): 466–81.

⁴⁶ Jordan et al., "Environmental Policy: Governing by Multiple Policy Instruments."

⁴⁷ S. Sikwela, "An Integrated Career Management Model for the Public Service: The Case of North West Department of Cooperative Governance, Traditional Affairs and Human Settlements" (North-West University-South Africa, 2023).

Rethinking instrument mixes: Insights from public policy

The comprehension of instrument choice necessitates incorporating critical variables like policy makers' perspectives, policy style, organisational culture and problem framing with institutional, ideational and episodic aspects of public policy, which is the approach clarified by.⁴⁸

Institutional approaches depict the critical role of instrument choices within the political context, recognising that institutions are artificial and subject to manipulation. These are "formal or informal rules, conventions, or practices, along with the organisational expressions these patterns of group behaviour may assume."⁴⁹ Typical institutional mechanisms address how specific institutions, when subjectively perceived, inadvertently guide actors in particular directions. Institutions contain standard operating procedures and norms from policy styles and problem framing by granting preference to instruments selected.⁵⁰ Moreover, instruments generate path dependencies as actors alter their preferences to fit older instruments and new problems are visualised through the prism of existing instrument choices. As a result, it is essential to analyse instrument selection over extended durations rather than isolated moments in time. Thus, there is a need to comprehend the metaphysical foundations of policy design.

Ideational approaches posit that ideas play a central role in driving change. Ideas and beliefs often influence the selection of policy instruments, with many suggesting that policymaking during "normal" periods primarily involves learning from the performance of specific instruments.⁵¹ Typically, policy instruments are adjusted to accommodate evolving political requirements. In instances of policy failure, perspective shifts are needed, thereby opening the opportunity to employ new instruments.⁵²

Episodic approaches contend that policymaking is inherently unstable because actors' preferences are unclear, actors operate under uncertain conditions, and organisations lack time to conduct comprehensive assessments. Due to the unpredictable ways these factors interplay, the achievement of setting the agenda (akin to the concept of problem framing proposed by Linder and Peters depends on luck and power resources given the complexity and multiple stakeholders in career management, which include line managers, senior managers, professionals, and skilled technicians.⁵³ Every role player significantly influences instrument selection. However, senior managers may have privileged positions due to their top positions and superior roles. They may push instruments they favour over other role players because of the adopted policy style.

Given the need to analyse instrument selection over extended durations rather than isolated moments, ideas as central in driving change, and policymaking as inherently unstable because actors' preferences are unclear. The study explores the ontological discourse in policy design.

EXPLORING ONTOLOGICAL DISCOURSES IN POLICY DESIGN

Transformational trends revealed that within policy design frameworks lie inherent contradicting characteristics, comprehensible by static or dynamic, transcendent or immanent, and singular or plural characteristics.⁵⁴ Examining these contrasting traits dates to Parmenides and Heraclitus (ancient Greek philosophers), whose divergent perspectives on existence continue to influence contemporary ontological debates.⁵⁵ This exploration sheds light on the ideal governance models underlying policy makers' perspectives, policy style, organisational culture and problem framing within policy design frameworks.⁵⁶ By exploring these perspectives, the study can uncover implicit biases in policy instrument choices, challenge dominant paradigms through normative claims, and promote the synthesis of diverging policy

⁴⁸ Jordan et al., "Environmental Policy: Governing by Multiple Policy Instruments."

⁴⁹ Wayne Parsons, "Public Policy: An Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Policy Analysis," *Edward Elgar* 194 (1995), 70.

⁵⁰ Jordan et al., "Environmental Policy: Governing by Multiple Policy Instruments."

⁵¹ Howlett and Ramesh, "Policy Subsystem Configurations and Policy Change: Operationalizing the Postpositivist Analysis of the Politics of the Policy Process."

⁵² Jordan et al., "Environmental Policy: Governing by Multiple Policy Instruments."

⁵³ Linder and Peters, "A Design Perspective on Policy Implementation: The Fallacies of Misplaced Prescription."

⁵⁴ M. Stout and J.M. Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance," *Administration & Society* 47, no. 4 (2015): 447–81; Stout, Tower, and Alkadry, "Reframing Workplace Spirituality to Reduce Career and Social Costs to Women," 2015; M. Stout and J.M. Love, "Competing Ontologies: A Redux Primer for Public Administration," *The American Review of Public Administration* 51, no. 6 (2021): 422–35.

⁵⁵ Gina M Reiners, "Understanding the Differences between Husserl's (Descriptive) and Heidegger's (Interpretive) Phenomenological Research," *Journal of Nursing & Care* 01, no. 05 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.4172/2167-1168.1000119>.

⁵⁶ Stout and Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance," 2015.

design frameworks for sustainable and integrative policy mixes.⁵⁷ To substantiate the assertion above, Gary Wamsley, in his 1996 work on "Refounding democratic public administration: *Modern paradoxes and postmodern challenges*," emphasises ontological disclosure as a fervent platform for making normative claims about any governance structure or phenomenon.

Institutional individual ontology

The traditional policy design is grounded on an institutional individual position, which depicts a static and singular expression originating from a transcendent source.⁵⁸ The traditional design initiated the "tools approach" and strategically aligned tools with goals, envisioning a blank canvas upon which policymakers freely imposed their intended policy interventions.⁵⁹ This blank canvas contends that the framework transcended mere policy formulation and implementation. It emerged as a transcendent practice whose source of existence lies beyond what existed, and its foundational principles lie beyond policy formulation and implementation.⁶⁰ Further, centralisation and government control reflect a singular *expression of existence*, which tends to align with a singular source of being (One).⁶¹ Consequently, it emphasises maintaining stability and control and contending that the design framework's state of existence is static, with entities and conditions relatively fixed and stable.⁶² This perspective suggests that policy design is guided by a unified set of principles or objectives without fragmentation or considering multiple sources of influence. The debate on the static, singular expression from a transcendent source parallels monotheism, addressing fundamental questions on reality and existence in policy design.⁶³

Monotheism fosters hierarchically ordered interactions, where the state embodies this transcendent source, aligning with constitutional traditions in public administration theory.⁶⁴ This perspective encompasses political, economic, and psychosocial theories, leading to deontological ethical dimensions. A political theory scenario establishes a hierarchical relationship between the divine and the world, with individuals in privileged positions enforcing adherence to the divine conception of the right. An economic theory, welfare capitalism, reinforces role definitions and coordinates these roles effectively. A psychosocial theory views individuals as imperfect copies of a separate metaphysical source of existence, subordinate to a hierarchical relationship with it. The mentioned leads to deontological ethical dimensions, where good comes from law-abiding and is demanded by the right.

Accordingly, career management instrument choice under this position prioritises public service commitment over individual goals, revealing that the prevailing problem framing favours organisational priorities by prioritising public service goals such as efficiency and effectiveness, resulting in career costs for employees.⁶⁵ Legislative measures and regulations and other policy instruments establish the framework for career management practices, aligning human resources precisely with service delivery needs.⁶⁶ Welfare capitalism principles guide the allocation of treasure instruments to support training programs and enhance workforce productivity for organisational efficiency.⁶⁷ Tax incentives encourage alignment with organisational goals. Psychosocial theories inform training and counselling services to guide individuals towards organisational goals. Nodality instruments raise awareness of ethical standards within the workforce, promoting accountability and social responsibility. Career progression aims to match individuals with performance goals efficiently. Organisational instruments, such as mentorship programs, uphold equity principles in guiding employees. Accordingly, the above stems from the statist policy style and cohesive nature of the society governed.⁶⁸

⁵⁷ Louis E Howe, "Enchantment, Weak Ontologies, and Administrative Ethics," *Administration & Society* 38, no. 4 (2006): 422–46, 426.

⁵⁸ Stout and Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance."

⁵⁹ Howlett, Mukherjee, and Woo, "From Tools to Toolkits in Policy Design Studies: The New Design Orientation towards Policy Formulation Research," 299.

⁶⁰ Margaret Stout, Leslie E Tower, and Mohamad G Alkadry, "Reframing Workplace Spirituality to Reduce Career and Social Costs to Women," *Public Integrity* 17, no. 2 (2015): 143–64.

⁶¹ Howlett, Mukherjee, and Woo, "From Tools to Toolkits in Policy Design Studies: The New Design Orientation towards Policy Formulation Research," 296.

⁶² Stout and Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance."

⁶³ Stout and Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance."

⁶⁴ Stout and Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance."

⁶⁵ Stout, Tower, and Alkadry, "Reframing Workplace Spirituality to Reduce Career and Social Costs to Women."

⁶⁶ Stout and Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance."

⁶⁷ Stout and Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance."

⁶⁸ Linder and Peters, "A Design Perspective on Policy Implementation: The Fallacies of Misplaced Prescription."

Atomistic Individual Ontology

Stout and Love proposed grounding corporatist policy design on the atomistic individual ontological position, suggesting a static, plural expression originating from an immanent source.⁶⁹ Democratic and governance studies in the 1990s favoured corporatist instruments, acknowledging that policy outcomes result from the interaction of diverse stakeholders, challenging exclusive government design.⁷⁰ Democratised processes involve collaborative actions and interests of multiple public and private stakeholders, highlighting the discrete existence and significance of individual entities in society. The focus on individual corporations, interest groups or other primary stakeholders as the primary unit of analysis is indicated by plural expression, recognising and accommodating diverse interests and actors. Corporatist policy designs often result from democratised processes, which are less designed and more emergent. Policy tools and solutions emerge from existing social and economic structures rather than being externally imposed, originating from an immanent source.⁷¹ The atomistic individual ontological position articulates collective and communitarian policy design associated with the humanism belief system. Humanism stipulates natural rights for everyone and the sacredness and equality stipulated by Marxist Humanism, aligning with autonomy, dignity and the intrinsic worth of all individuals.⁷²

The atomistic individual ontological position aligns with the New Public Service administrative theory, presupposing pluralist competition. In this perspective, individuals are static in identity, legitimising representative selection based on the similarity of beliefs or superior reasoning abilities.⁷³ Regarding economic theory, the atomistic individual position adopts the Lockean utilitarian view prevalent in modern liberalism. Individuals are inherently self-interested, with fixed preferences, competing to maximise personal gains while minimising costs, often disregarding the impact on others. This mindset forms the basis for free market transactions characterised by minimal regulation and influenced by supply and demand mechanisms, aiming for equilibrium.⁷⁴ The psychosocial theory views each person as a "universe of one," emphasising the need for social bonds to be established through various mechanisms, resembling either the Hobbesian individual in the state of nature or the classical Cartesian notion of the unified subject.⁷⁵

Regarding ethics, this position leads to competitive approaches in determining what is good and right, with teleological systems guiding action toward chosen interests.⁷⁶ This stance reflects Niebuhr's "man-the-maker" concept, where right is tied to what is deemed good, and rules serve as utilitarian tools to achieve desired ends. Thus, it mirrors competitive, interest-seeking political and organisational forms.

Career management instrument choices improve productivity. The public service may invest in employee benefits to enhance recruitment, retention, and performance, reflecting a supportive and humanistic purpose. Legislative and regulatory frameworks emphasise minimal regulation and free market transactions, aiming to create an environment conducive to competition and efficiency. These authority instruments ensure fair competition, creating a myth that everyone can have it all. Nevertheless, economic theories depict individuals as inherently self-interested and competitive, which influences the employment of treasure instruments. Treasure instruments prioritise human capital investments during good economic times.⁷⁷ Incentives target individuals' self-interest and competitiveness, offering rewards for achieving specific career aspirations to contribute to economic growth. Organisational instruments, like training programs, help individuals navigate the competitive job market, enhancing their employability and success. These instruments encourage mentorship programs and job placement services to efficiently match individuals with job opportunities, aligning with their competitive nature. Holland's theory for matching persons to jobs highlights the importance of services leveraging technology and data analytics to optimise the matching process and enhance labour market efficiency. Nodality instruments promote

⁶⁹ Stout and Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance."

⁷⁰ Howlett and Lejano, "Tales from the Crypt: The Rise and Fall (and Rebirth?) Of Policy Design."

⁷¹ Stout and Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance."

⁷² Stout and Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance."

⁷³ Stout and Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance."

⁷⁴ J. B. Davis, *The Theory of the Individual in Economics: Identity and Value* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003).

⁷⁵ Camilla Stivers, *Governance in Dark Times: Practical Philosophy for Public Service* (Georgetown University Press, 2008); David John Farmer, *To Kill the King: Post-Traditional Governance and Bureaucracy* (M.E.Sharpe, 2005).

⁷⁶ Stout, Tower, and Alkadry, "Reframing Workplace Spirituality to Reduce Career and Social Costs to Women."

⁷⁷ Stout, Tower, and Alkadry, "Reframing Workplace Spirituality to Reduce Career and Social Costs to Women."

public awareness of the importance of employability, meritocracy, and individual initiatives in achieving career success within a competitive economic framework. Thus cultivating an organisational culture or interconnection and interdependence but the problem framing aligns towards favouring teleological goals over individual goals.⁷⁸

Fragmented Individual Ontology

The market-oriented policy design is grounded on the fragmented individual ontological position, suggesting a dynamic state of existence with plural expression and originating from the immanent source. This pluralistic expression clarifies why market-oriented policy design acknowledges multiple stakeholders. These entities possess distinct characteristics subject to change over time, reflecting a dynamic existence.⁷⁹ Policy design arises immanently from existing societal structures, viewed as emergent rather than planned. Decentralised decision-making mechanisms and market forces determine resource allocation, with policies incentivising market principles. This ontological position recognises the dynamic and pluralistic nature of the market, crafting policy instruments accordingly to promote efficiency, competition, and innovation. Fragmentation refers to a dichotomy between market and state instruments, resulting in polarised discussions between hierarchical and market-based approaches. Stout and Love link the fragmented individual ontological position to the atheist belief system due to the absence of a sacred or inherent source of existence.⁸⁰

The fragmentation of individual ontological position aligns with an atheist perspective, per the New Public Management (N.P.M.) administrative theory, which empowers administrators to pursue efficient and effective outcomes using market-based mechanisms. N.P.M. theory supports economic growth and enhances government efficiency and effectiveness through business-oriented approaches. In the political theory scenario, political representation becomes elusive due to the ever-evolving nature of identity, giving rise to individual anarchism.⁸¹ Individual anarchism advocates individual sovereignty, rejecting any form of political authority intended to limit individual freedom. Regarding economic theory, individuals cannot establish genuine connections and are ill-prepared to navigate the growing influence of the neoliberal market. Sceptical postmodernism observes that consumers are shaped by market dynamics, forming their identities through the consumption of community, politics, and products. In the psychosocial theory, the individual exhibits a decentralised identity within a socially isolated context, characterised by sceptical postmodernism, with identity constituted by multiple identities subject to fluctuating external influences. Ethical considerations enhance moral scepticism/relativism, prioritising individual determination of what constitutes good based on the value it generates.⁸²

Career management instrument choices aim to leverage market dynamics to foster individual initiative, entrepreneurship, and innovation, prioritising efficiency, effectiveness, and economic growth while promoting individual autonomy and adaptability. Authority instruments focus on creating a conducive environment for market competition rather than imposing stringent controls on career management practices. Organisational instruments encourage public-private partnerships and treasure investments in career development initiatives, offering incentives for self-directed career development activities or engaging in innovative ventures. Training and development opportunities policy instruments emphasise aligning skills development with market trends and demands, ensuring employability. At the same time, nodality instruments support campaigns promoting entrepreneurship, innovation, and the value of market competition in driving economic growth.

These ontological positions reflect contradictory situations arising from the choice and interaction of career management instruments across policy design paradigms. These paradoxes may hinder progress in enhancing policy mixes. Fragmentation and competitiveness can contradict order principles in traditional policy design, leading to diverse individual vs. organisational goals and negative consequences. Ideas and beliefs drive instrument choices; thus, ideas are the main drivers of change. The fragmented approach contends that autonomy is the main driver for change. Where institutional and atomistic

⁷⁸ Linder and Peters, "A Design Perspective on Policy Implementation: The Fallacies of Misplaced Prescription."

⁷⁹ Stout and Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance."

⁸⁰ Stout and Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance."

⁸¹ Stout and Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance."

⁸² Stout and Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance."

positions depict order and pluralistic choices as drivers for change. By basing policy instrument selection on integrative governance, the study contends the fine-tuning of policy instruments in meeting the changing global political demands of governance and democracy. However, this can be explored in the methodological implications section below.

METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The previous sections delineated choosing and integrating policy instruments in career management across public service departments. The institutional position follows a static and linear teleological path. In contrast, the atomistic position views individuals as static in identity, while the fragmentation position rejects static foundational truths, either a priori or a posteriori, reflecting conflicting paradoxes discussed below.

Conflicting epistemological pathological paradoxes

The knowledge structure contends that belief in static existence corresponds with foundationalism, implying a hierarchical knowledge framework based on foundational epistemological beliefs in institutional and atomistic positions. Foundationalism derives truth from formal logic (rationalism) or systematic observation (empiricism), providing a stable basis for knowledge justification.⁸³ In contrast, belief in dynamic existence in fragmentation rejects foundational truths and seeks coherence among concepts, relying on constructivism.⁸⁴ The nature of knowledge and truth is justified through internal and external justification. The institutional individual position validates beliefs through intellectual logic or a priori belief, while the atomistic position relies on reliable experiential evidence or social agreement. Internal justification, exemplified by the monotheistic belief inherent in the institutional position, relies on intellectual logic or a priori belief without empirical evidence. External justification, exemplified by the humanistic belief in the atomistic and fragmentation positions, emphasises human values and empirical research to inform policy design and promote social justice and equality.⁸⁵

Foundationalism and coherentism, external and internal, are dialectical paradoxes illustrating contradictory situations arising from opposing concepts in policy design. Foundationalism relies on static foundational truths, while coherentism rejects fixed foundations and emphasises interconnected beliefs. This tension between stable foundations and dynamic knowledge inhibits progress, potentially leading to stagnation if researchers fail to reconcile these perspectives and explore innovative approaches. External and internal present a paradox as external stances rely on objective knowledge sources, while internal stances prioritise subjective understanding. This conflict between objective and subjective forms of knowledge may hinder collaboration and interdisciplinary dialogue if researchers rigidly adhere to one epistemological stance rather than integrating multiple perspectives to enrich understanding and foster innovation.

Synthesis and integration of epistemological paradoxes

Integrating elements from both foundationalism and coherentism is essential within the epistemological discourse to acknowledge the significance of establishing stable foundations while concurrently accommodating the dynamic and interconnected nature inherent in the realm of knowledge. Therefore, collaborating various methodologies through a pragmatic approach is imperative to facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of complex research questions. Pragmatism encourages the adoption of a flexible, adaptive, and responsive research methodology that can combine experience with evidence. The research methodology should explore the intersections of rationalism, empiricism, and constructivism in understanding the challenges encountered in distributing career management policy instruments within South African public service departments.

Research methodology and design.

Rationalism emphasises reason, logic, and deductive reasoning. Thus, it aligns with quantitative research. Empiricism highlights the importance of observation, experience, and evidence in gaining knowledge

⁸³ Gila Sher, "Epistemic Friction: Reflections on Knowledge, Truth, and Logic," *Erkenntnis* 72 (2010): 153–81, 154.

⁸⁴ Stout and Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance."

⁸⁵ Stout and Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance."

about the world. Constructivism emphasises that individuals construct their understanding of the world based on experiences, interactions, and interpretations. Therefore, mixed methods research was ideal for this study because it provided a range of research approaches and was practical in addressing research questions and achieving desired outcomes.⁸⁶ This methodology involves collecting and analysing numerical data to test hypotheses and employing quantitative research techniques to collect and analyse data from skilled technicians and professionals at the North West Province Departments of COGTA and Human Settlements. Including qualitative research methods which focus on exploring and understanding complex phenomena through the collection and analysis of non-numerical data, such as interviews, observations, and textual analysis. Mixed methods research involves triangulating findings from surveys and interviews to uncover patterns and meanings related to the choice of career management instruments challenges within the mentioned South African public service departments.

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON FINDINGS

Figure 1 below indicates that while quantitative findings suggest that some respondents perceive their careers progressing as expected, a closer examination reveals that those responses predominantly originate from middle and senior management.

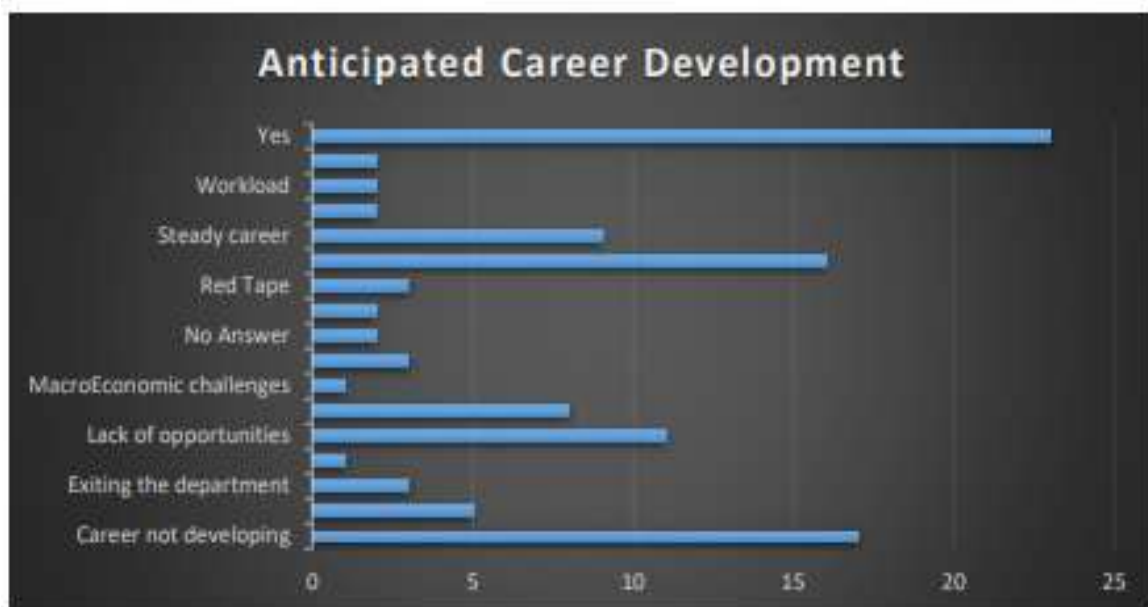


Figure 2: Anticipated career development
Source: Constructed from SPSS

Consequently, a subset of respondents reported stagnant career trajectories, attributing this stagnation to factors like limited career growth opportunities, lack of experiential work, insufficient appreciation from management, absence of skills development workshops, perceived biases in appointment and promotion processes, including favouritism and nepotism, and broader macroeconomic challenges. On the contrary, Participant 11 revealed during interviews that both departments need to perform better to achieve their goals as expected. This observation aligns with the literature review, highlighting prevalent issues such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality manifesting in housing shortages, substandard infrastructure, and inadequate living conditions.⁸⁷ Therefore, it is evident that both departments need to perform as expected.

The findings revealed that career management policy instruments should align due to the prevalence of competition and the dominance of organisational or employee goals in their distribution.

⁸⁶ H. Strydom and C.S.L. Delpont, "Sampling and Pilot Study in Qualitative Research," in *Research at Grass Roots. For the Social Sciences and Human Service Professions*, ed. A.S. De Vos et al., 4th ed. (Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers, 2011), 390–96.

⁸⁷ North West Provincial Government, "Annual Report 2016/17 Financial Year, North West Department of Local Government and Human Settlements (NWPDLGHS)," 2017; North West Provincial Government, "Annual Report 2019/20. North West Province Department of Human Settlements (NWPDHS)," 2020; North West Provincial Government, "Annual Performance Plan. North West Province Department of Human Settlements (NWPDHS)," 2021.

These factors lead to tensions and resistance to instrument choices. Participant 16 mentioned that performance bonuses are allocated based on pressing provincial departmental needs, leaving Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) funds inadequate. This imbalance in allocation causes tension among employees who question why smaller amounts are allocated to them while the focus is on meeting pressing provincial needs. Moreover, Participant 7 highlighted that the committee responsible for performance management ratings changes final scores based on financial budget constraints rather than performance despite clearly defined job descriptions. Most participants reported feeling burdened. Participants 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 12, 23, 24, 25, and 26 attested to feeling burdened due to a lack of treasure policy instruments, leading to employee turnover stemming from financial competition with the private sector. Participants 5, 7, 8, 13 and 24 attest to the mentioned by stating that the young generation is leaving due to meagre salaries. Even though the public sector provides bursaries, some respondents need access to funding or support for their studies because employee development funding is inaccessible to everyone.

These challenges reveal that the most prevalent ontologies dominating are institutional and atomistic perspectives, where competition demands hierarchy as solutions to its excesses, and hierarchy demands competition as a solution to its own inefficiencies and undemocratic characteristics.⁸⁸ To elaborate, the competition in treasure instruments demands stringent authority policy instruments, as solutions to its excesses as asserted by most participants agreeing that policies and regulations must be enforced and implemented, with participants 1 and 22 revealing that the legislative frameworks guide both departments. Participants 26 and 23 contend that managers use these tools to monitor employees to achieve public service goals. Meanwhile, hierarchy demands competition as a solution to inefficiencies and undemocratic characteristics. For instance, in the Employment Equity Policy and the PMDS, Participants 2, 23, 20, 16, 26, and 3 emphasised the importance of empowering women in the Department. However, they acknowledged the link between gender, qualifications and performance stipulating hierarchy as fabricated in competition.

Attempts to bridge this gap through governance reform often reflect individual anarchism precepts, which leads to public managers abusing their positions. Explicitly, participants 1, 3, 12, 13 and 21 believe that misusing leadership positions by exploiting other subordinates harms day-to-day operations. Further, the PMDS has become a reward tool that employees and managers abuse. Participants 25, 2 and 13 state that employees expect to be rated higher because they want bonuses at the end of the year. Participant 24 states that the PMDS is a vendetta to settle managers' scores. The findings reflect that employees and managers use these instruments for selfish agendas. Hence, there is a need to integrate the NWPDCOGTA and NWPDHS.

INTEGRATED POLICY INSTRUMENTS: BRIDGING DIVERSE APPROACHES

The empirical research shows that public service departments need help aligning employee development initiatives with performance objectives due to the failure to select and integrate diverse instruments to bridge the gap. This section recommends the theoretical, research implications and practical approaches to achieve this seamless integration to balance individual and organisational goals. Firstly, the theoretical framework enables policymakers and researchers to analyse policy mixes' composition, interaction, and impact in informing strategic decision-making processes. Translating theoretical insights into actionable strategies empowers policymakers to enhance the efficacy and relevance of policy mixes in addressing real-world challenges. By examining strategies, public service departments can employ to integrate and operationalise diverse policy instruments effectively that tie the whole section together.

Theoretical foundations for policy instruments integration

The empirical findings confirm the inherent discord within the ontological discourses. Hierarchical ontologies firmly ensure that policy instruments promote complete commitment to achieving public service goals over employee goals, while atomistic ontologies direct these instruments towards a supportive and humanistic purpose.⁸⁹ Fragmented ontologies support autonomy, privatisation, and decentralisation, revealing selfish individual employees' desires, causing conflicts in teamwork and

⁸⁸ Margaret Stout and Jeannine M Love, "Competing Ontologies: A Redux Primer for Public Administration," *The American Review of Public Administration* 51, no. 6 (2021): 422–35.

⁸⁹ Stout, Tower, and Alkadry, "Reframing Workplace Spirituality to Reduce Career and Social Costs to Women."

compromising organisational policy instruments. These varied ontological paradigms collectively optimise what Stout and Love contend as strong ontologies, with hierarchical and atomistic ontologies asserting a static and fixed order to existence.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, they both reject each other's state of existence or expression. In contrast, fragmented ontologies hold rigid commitment to extreme individualist principles.⁹¹ In this section, the article attempts to acknowledge the interconnectedness and relationships that encourage and merge differences through integrative governance to cultivate inclusivity and genuine collaborations. The synthesis of different ontological positions facilitates the above.

Synthesis is possible by leaning on the principle postulated by White and elucidated in Stout and Love's work, which suggests that weak ontologies offer a more favourable prospect for synthesis and integrative governance.⁹² This notion aligns with Christ's assertion that a novel, adaptable integration of competing ontologies, characterised by their weakness, can facilitate responsiveness to and synthesis of diverse ontological perspectives.⁹³ If White contended that weak ontologies are receptive to debate and diversity because they accept the fluidity of existence, then they can facilitate change and adaptability.⁹⁴ However, it is challenging to integrate competing ontologies, like hierarchical, atomistic, and fragmented, because they possess strong characteristics, making them rigid, extreme, and inflexible. Consequently, Stout and Love argue that the competitive push and pull in both the institutional and atomistic and the need for alternatives offered by extreme excesses of individualism, confirmed in the empirical findings, reveal their weakness.⁹⁵ These tensions arising from competition can fuel reform initiatives, propelling societies from adherence to singular governance types while enhancing integration. Stout and Love argued that varying ontological perspectives exert reciprocal influence on one another and seldom exist in absolute form, as explained by the relational process ontology.⁹⁶

Relational process ontology

Stout and Love assert that the relational process ontology is adaptive, signifying that stable attributes from institutional and atomistic positions can blend with dynamic features from the fragmentation position in a process of continuous evolution shaped by potentiality, environmental influences and prior states of existence.⁹⁷ The definition above states three main attributes of the relational ontology namely potentiality, environmental influences and prior existence. Regarding potentiality, the institutional position holds the potential to establish order in collective relationships. In contrast, the fragmentation position can potentially advocate for autonomy within these relationships, and the atomistic position may enhance democratic pluralist choice mechanisms. Environmental influences in this regard are current factors within public service that encompass political, cultural, and economic preferences. Concerning cultural influences, the article contends that competitive behaviour and the push and pull between institutional and atomistic perspectives lead to Western culture dominating cultural perspectives in African public service governance structures.

The prior state of existence makes the study appreciate the assemblage of different ontologies in the relational process ontology. The hierarchical ontologies seek order, atomistic ontologies seek choice, and fragmented ontologies seek autonomy. Hierarchical, atomistic and fragmented characteristics are *assembled* together continuously and dynamically. Adaptive, dynamic and ongoing traits suggest that the relational process ontology is a weak ontology devoid of rigid, hierarchical and strictly individualist principles, which allows precepts for constant change devoid of fixed positional roles and ideal for instrument mixes in public service departments because it can facilitate responsiveness to and synthesis of diverse ontological perspectives, precepts stipulated by White.⁹⁸

⁹⁰ Stout, Tower, and Alkadry, "Reframing Workplace Spirituality to Reduce Career and Social Costs to Women."

⁹¹ Stout and Love, "Competing Ontologies: A Redux Primer for Public Administration."

⁹² Stout and Love, "Competing Ontologies: A Redux Primer for Public Administration"; S. K. White, *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory* (Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁹³ Carol P Christ, *She Who Changes: Re-Imagining the Divine in the World* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

⁹⁴ S. K. White, *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory* (Princeton University Press, 2000). 9.

⁹⁵ Stout and Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance."

⁹⁶ Stout and Love, "Competing Ontologies: A Redux Primer for Public Administration," 8.

⁹⁷ Stout and Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance."

⁹⁸ White, *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory*.

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The relational process ontology as a weak ontology supports an adaptive epistemological stance that integrates formal and informal knowledge sources in policy design, thereby endorsing pragmatism, which merges the structural aspects of foundational and coherentism epistemologies into a synthesised framework.⁹⁹ Through the relational process ontology, this research recommends the fusion of logic, intuition, empirical observations and social co-creation of knowledge to comprehend instrument mixes in policy design. This statement reinforces that research in policy design must be comprehended through scientific, humanistic, cultural, religious, and spiritual approaches proposed in the study by Stout et al. because they inform how policy mixes can be comprehended.¹⁰⁰

Considering the factors mentioned, it becomes apparent that policy design or instrument mixes in African organisations may be compromised by overlooking these identified factors. For example, policy design in African organisations often aligns with Western cultural and philosophical precepts, influenced by figures like Parmenides, a pioneer of positivism. This perspective asserts a static reality, pluralism, grounded in atomistic individualism, and self-interested human beings as the optimal path towards democratic practices that enable individual pursuit of happiness in achieving organisational performance goals. The empirical findings show that hierarchy and competition are acknowledged as the main legitimising factors that enhance the distribution of policy instruments in the North West Province Departments of Cooperative Governance, Traditional Affairs, and Human Settlements, indicating the apparent influence of Western culture. Unfortunately, policy design in Africa continues to face the challenge of ontological colonisation by Western cultural philosophy, as Western liberalism has become dominant, overshadowing alternative worldviews.¹⁰¹

Relying solely on Western ideologies of hierarchy and competition does not accurately reflect the lived experiences across African governments and may exclude non-Western views and experiences.¹⁰² African worldviews, such as Ubuntu, emphasise communal values, individuality, and social responsibility, while Sino-centric values of Asian descent similarly embrace these principles. This study does not aim to discredit Western cultures but advocates for a thoughtful integration of traditions that consider the application of research to policy design within the African context. African policy design research should not simply mimic ideological trends in Europe and North America, as this approach can lead to conflicts in policy instrument mixes. Remarkably, the process ontology facilitates comparative analysis, offering policymakers a valuable tool to make informed decisions, learn from diverse experiences, and ultimately enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of policy mixes by embracing various scientific, humanistic, spiritual, and religious approaches to career management across public service departments. The relational process ontology recognises multiple perspectives on policy design, including Western culture, Sino-centric approaches in developmental states and African traditions such as Ubuntu. By acknowledging these diverse viewpoints, policy design can move beyond superficial considerations of race and ethnicity to embrace a broader range of theories, including patristic and communitarian theories, which inform the understanding of policy mixes.

Implementing instrument mix strategies for public service departments.

Conflicting individual career aspirations and public service values across public service departments require a re-evaluation to achieve a harmonious balance of policy instruments. This alignment can potentially increase and enhance career satisfaction and organisational performance outcomes. The previous sections revealed that the relational process of ontology can enhance this harmonious balance, and the following diagram presents these precepts.

⁹⁹ Stout and Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance."

¹⁰⁰ Stout, Tower, and Alkadry, "Reframing Workplace Spirituality to Reduce Career and Social Costs to Women."

¹⁰¹ Lloyd G Adu Amoah, "Public Policy Formation in Africa: Toward a Grounded Ontology," *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 32, no. 4 (2010): 606–10.

¹⁰² Amoah, "Public Policy Formation in Africa: Toward a Grounded Ontology."

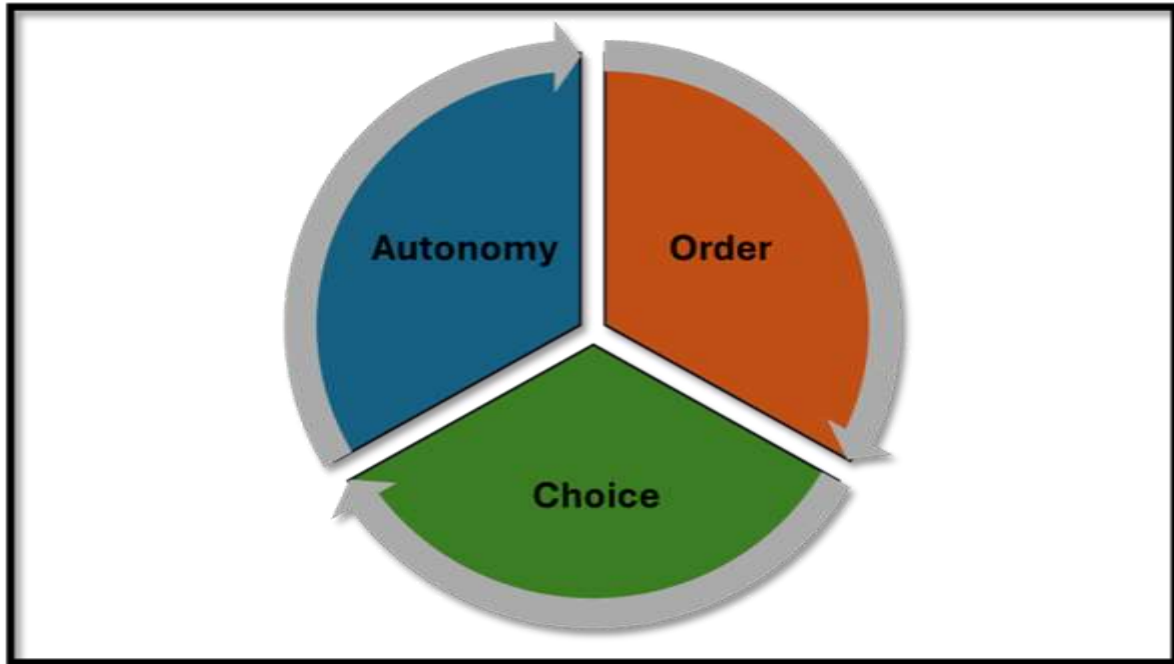


Figure 3: Integration of autonomy, order and choice principles
Source: Author's construction

Figure 2 illustrates how integrative governance principles from the relational process ontology enable effective instrument mixes by integrating hierarchical principles for collective order with atomistic and fragmentation principles for individual choice and autonomy.¹⁰³ This integration merges traditional considerations with market-oriented and corporatist policy designs.

Regarding the order, hierarchical ontologies propose a single transcendent origin of existence, generating distinct components that function together in a mechanistic manner, forming a unified whole while maintaining their identities.¹⁰⁴ A mechanistic manner depicts a system of interlocking parts transmitting forces and applying the machine analogy described by Beach and Pedersen comprehends this system of interlocking parts. In their analogy, the authors state that a toothed wheel can transmit dynamic causal energy to the next toothed wheel in an orderly manner.¹⁰⁵ Consequently, the machine analogy depicts order by viewing nodality, authority, treasure and organisational policy instruments as interlocking parts working towards a favourable outcome of enhancing individual development and organisational performance outcome. Adopting this analogy preserves the precepts of hierarchical ontologies, which depict that all parts lack independence and are imperfect copies of the whole.¹⁰⁶ Each policy instrument lacks the independence to produce an outcome and only functions as a collective whole with the rest of other policy instruments, restoring order proposed by hierarchical ontologies.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, authority instruments cannot independently achieve the stipulated goals and bridge the stated gap; they must collectively function with an organisation, treasure, and nodality instruments. Therefore, instrument calibration mixes begin with a collective order of authority, treasure, and organisational and nodality instruments to adopt the machine analogy collectively.

Concerning autonomy from fragmented ontologies, it opposes dominating authority over individuals by prioritising individual autonomy over collective domination or control. This notion stipulates that individual instruments hold authority over themselves.¹⁰⁸ The relevance of this ontology describes how social structures and cultural perspectives can constrain how specific individual policy instruments can

¹⁰³ Stout and Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance."

¹⁰⁴ Stout and Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance."

¹⁰⁵ D. Beach and R.B. Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019).

¹⁰⁶ Stout and Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance."

¹⁰⁷ Beach and Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines*.; Stout and Love, "Competing Ontologies: A Redux Primer for Public Administration," 2021.

¹⁰⁸ Stout and Love, "Competing Ontologies: A Redux Primer for Public Administration."

function because of how these shape individuals' beliefs and desires. Thus, each NATO instrument must act independently despite external influences, and this avoids domination of either authority instrument over treasure instruments. Other instruments cannot dominate each other's unique function; thus, respecting this stance rejects domination in instrument choices. For instance, the lack of funds does not mean projecting regulatory frameworks to coerce behaviour to distribute those funds; it means removing the instrument from the list because it becomes irrelevant. Fragmentation and autonomy present the inclusion of significant instruments as this produces a disciplining effect for the public service.¹⁰⁹ Thus, the disciplining effect is that the public service engages in policy instruments that are particularly important to produce a given outcome—comprehending policy instruments as individually necessary for the pluralist choice proposed by the atomistic position.¹¹⁰

Stout and Love argue that the atomistic position asserts the determination of representation through pluralist choice mechanisms, and it is deeply rooted in the corporatist context of the evolving democratic and governance literature, which suggests that the social world comprises nonlinear associations.¹¹¹ Therefore, a reasonable choice seeks an ontological understanding and commitment to life as an ongoing process among interdependent beings.¹¹² Since autonomy reveals the uniqueness of each instrument, and order represents that all instruments always lead to outcomes, the pluralist choice depicts that authority instruments cannot independently lead to an outcome but must work with treasure, organisation and nodality instruments as they depend on each other.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The North West Province Departments of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (NWDCOGTA) and Human Settlements (NWPDHS) demonstrated underperformance in retaining and developing scarce skilled professionals. This study has revealed that the underlying cause of this deficiency is the misalignment of NATO policy instruments, mainly due to the dominance of hierarchical principles, reliance on coercive measures, and an overarching preference for control over democratic processes. As a result, key stakeholders in both departments should realign policy instruments to establish a more balanced approach that incorporates principles of order, pluralist choice and autonomy. This alignment will address gaps in employee development and performance management and is crucial for addressing existing employee development and performance management gaps.

The observed misalignment underscores the necessity of cultural integration within governance frameworks. By integrating African cultural values and embracing diversity within policy design, public service leaders can inspire a more inclusive and holistic governance approach. This integration will not only address the observed misalignments but also lead to a more effective public service environment. Additionally, the implementation of targeted capacity-building programs and enforcement of compliance with legislative frameworks will address skills shortages and ensure adherence to nodality and treasure instruments, thereby promoting sustainable career growth and enhancing organisational efficiency.

CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the alignment of policy instruments in career management within South African public service departments. The findings indicate significant misalignments and an overreliance on hierarchical, rigid and exclusionary principles, which impede meaningful transformation. Addressing these challenges through integrating diverse governance perspectives and the strategic alignment of policy instruments is fundamental for achieving a balanced and effective public service environment. Future research should explore the integration of various cultural perspectives into governance models within the African continent. Amoah emphasised the relevance of recognising African cultural values and diversity by arguing that while public policy formation can draw from Western ideas, it should be grounded in reflecting African cultural values to foster empirically robust and contextually appropriate policy development. Integrative governance, accommodating these diverse perspectives, will drive future research endeavours in policy design.

¹⁰⁹ Beach and Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines*.

¹¹⁰ Stout and Love, "Relational Process Ontology: A Grounding for Global Governance."

¹¹¹ Stout and Love, "Competing Ontologies: A Redux Primer for Public Administration."

¹¹² M P Follett, "Creative Experience," *Logmans Green*, 1924, 102.

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