of an attempt to "avoid dilemmas" that it perhaps would be possible to speak about a specific research tradition. I want to describe this tradition in the following pages while pointing to its limits (see also *Musil et al.* 2004).

Inspired by *Lipsky*, in the first chapter I will explore the idea that it is useful to perceive the approach to clients as a result of an attempt of frontline social workers to cope with equivocal working conditions and the associated dilemmas, which has become part of the culture of a specific organisation. In the chapters that follow, I will show how the approach to clients is based on the attempt of social workers to cope with dilemmas between complex and simplified goals, between the quantity of clients and the quality of services, between neutrality and favouritism, between one-sided or symmetric relationships with clients, between procedural and situational approaches, between providing material and immaterial help and, finally, between the attempt to intervene in a timely fashion and an apprehension that the intervention could be precipitate. I will define each of these dilemmas and show with empirical examples how the given dilemma is "avoided" in practical situations and how this practice influences the approach of workers to clients.

The findings of those researchers who understand the treatment of clients by social workers as the outcome of "avoiding dilemmas" may inspire social workers, social work teachers and their students alike. It should be noted However that *Lipsky* pays attention to just one way of coping with dilemmas in work with clients, and it is hence not advisable to hastily generalise his theoretical assumptions. I will therefore conclude by showing an empirical description of the approach of social workers who face dilemmas in their work otherwise than "avoiding" them.

Chapter 1: Avoiding Dilemmas

Lipsky's above-mentioned understanding of the circumstances that influence the approach to clients rests on four notions that in represent a consistent framework in his eyes. These are: "uncertain[4] working conditions", "discretion", "street-level policy" and "avoiding dilemmas". In this chapter, I will discuss the latter in detail and refer to the remaining three where needed. I am doing so for three reasons: Firstly because each of the said notions would deserve a separate treatise, for which there is not enough room here. Secondly because the notion of "avoiding dilemmas" is crucial from the perspective of the research tradition on which this study focuses, and finally because *Lipsky* employs the idea of "avoiding dilemmas" implicitly, which suggests that although applying it, he has never systematically described and worked it out. I will therefore try to do this myself.

I will show in what sense *Lipsky* uses the term "dilemma", how he understands the emergence of dilemmas in work with the client in practice and how *Lipsky* describes the coping with dilemmas by frontline workers of street-level bureaucracies.[5] I will attempt to systematically convey his understanding of "avoiding dilemmas" using the notions of "importunate" and "latent" dilemmas and the notion "rationalisation" captured in the *Goffmanian* way. In the conclusion of the initial chapter, I will discuss the question of how, from *Lipsky's* perspective, coping with dilemmas influences the approach of social workers to clients. In this context, I will present the assumption that it is a specific function of the culture of social work service organisations to create grounds for avoiding dilemmas by their frontline workers.

How to avoid dilemmas?

According to the dictionary, a "dilemma" is a "necessary (and sometimes difficult) choice between two mutually exclusive options" (*Klimeš* 1981: 112). This definition refers to two characteristics of dilemmatic situations: Firstly, some op-

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[4] *Lipsky* (1980: xii, 27, 40) characterises the working conditions of street-level bureaucrats most frequently with the adjectives "inadequate", "ambiguous", "vague", "conflicting", "diffuse". He summarily refers to circumstances of such a nature as "uncertainties and work pressures" that street-level bureaucrats try to cope with using their policies (*Lipsky* 1980: xii).

[5] "Street-level bureaucracies" are agencies funded from public budgets and employing "a significant number of street-level bureaucrats in proportion to their workforce" (*Lipsky* 1991: 3).

tions are incompatible. Secondly, choosing between them tends to be difficult. The meaning of the affirmation that a "choice is necessary" is not entirely clear within the said definition. It can be understood in two ways. Either it may refer to the idea that people who face a dilemma have no other option and they "necessarily have to decide". Or it may emphasise the incompatibility of the options between which those who are forced to undergo the choice "necessarily have to choose" without there being any avoidance. The two options remain incompatible for those who need not grapple with the dilemma, but they need not choose between them.

It is difficult to guess how the author of the dictionary entry meant it. It is clear However that *Lipsky* would prefer the second of the two interpretations, for in his eyes people can avoid dilemmas or at least do so for as long as possible when confronted with them. Although the term "dilemma" comes up on innumerable occasions on the pages of his book, you will not find a story in it about street-level bureaucrats having difficulty choosing between mutually exclusive options. Instead you will read descriptions of habits and attitudes that make it possible for the workers of street-level bureaucracies to avoid such difficult decisions for prolonged periods of time.

Lipsky's description of the way in which street-level bureaucrats cope with the difficult decisions between providing their service to a large number of clients and preserving the quality of their services, is a demonstration of this train of thought. In this context, *Lipsky* (1980: 99) literally labels as a "dilemma" the fact that it is hard for frontline workers to address the problems of every client appropriately to his or her situation. If they approached too large a number of clients in the same way, their ability to be responsive would be exhausted, because there would be no time left for other clients.

Had *Lipsky* used the term "dilemma" to refer to the fact that frontline workers "have to unavoidably decide between two incompatible options", he would probably have continued by describing how street-level bureaucrats hopelessly fret over the insoluble question: "How to behave in a responsive manner to all clients when that is unmanageable?!?" In fact *Lipsky* does not speak about the difficulty of deciding at all. Instead he regards resolving this question as a threat that, although "being in the air", street-level bureaucrats are capable of endlessly putting off in terms of its actual emergence.

According to *Lipsky* (1980: 38, 99-107, 125-139), they do this by somewhat lowering the quality of their services when needed, perhaps by allowing long queues before their offices. Some clients get "fed up with it" and give up. Those who persist are divided by the street-level bureaucrats into "more urgent cases" to which they pay more attention and provide better services, and "less urgent cases" to which they attend less. There is less work in general, the accustomed quality standards are preserved for a part of the clients and any complaints there are about neglecting the other clients can be explained by the "necessity to mobilise the insufficient resources for the most urgent cases". Should the number of clients in the first group increase over time and the quality of work be once again threatened by this increasing number, it is possible to put off the potentially impending dilemma once again using a similar method: for example by beginning to attach a lot of importance to properly completed forms, finding out retrospectively from time to time that an additional confirmation should have been served, letting the client queue several times, etc. Those interested in the service who fail to give up even under such circumstances, can be further "sorted", this time perhaps by the duration of their dependence on social assistance benefits, into "strainers" and "sluggards". Thus the dilemma that remains permanently impending due to public services being free to the clients can be put off almost indefinitely.

Hence in *Lipsky's* understanding, frontline workers frequently face a difficult choice. This usually presents a challenge for them which they rarely resolve by urgently making a decision. Workers try to find a way of putting the difficult choice off or avoiding it entirely. If they succeed, they routinely repeat the invented method. Sometimes the solution found fails and the painful choice must be made anyway. If this happens just exceptionally or to an acceptable and foreseeable extent, the solution found is accepted in the organisation as a recognised rule for treating clients. The dilemma falls into the shade to be replaced by a routine way of grinding it down.

"Importunate" and "latent" dilemmas

We shall further avoid the above ambiguities in the interpretation of the term "necessary choice" by discriminating between two types of dilemma – "importunate" and "latent."

An "importunate dilemma" is faced by those workers whose working conditions[6] and the way in which they perceive these conditions make them urgently choose between two options, which are incompatible from their perspective. Workers facing this type of dilemma have no other option but to necessarily make a decision. This happens if three circumstances occur at once. Firstly, working conditions make the frontline workers in the organisation face expectation conflict; secondly, these workers are morally sensitive to this expectation conflict; and thirdly, frontline workers in the given organisation have a feeling of their own responsibility for urgently making a difficult decision.

The first two conditions characterise the onset of any dilemma. Hence the dilemmas to which *Lipsky* refers emerge from the interaction between uncertain working conditions on one hand and a more or less receptive response[7] of frontline workers to the expectation conflict induced by these working conditions. The dilemma thus arising becomes "importunate" if frontline workers have a sufficiently strong motivation to make the difficult decision.

The necessity to cope with expectation conflict may firstly be provoked by "conflict with the surroundings", i.e. a conflict between expectations of the workers and expectations of an influential entity in their surroundings. Secondly, the necessity to cope with expectation conflict may be the result of a so-called "battle of motives" – a conflict between two[8] different expectations of workers who experience it as their "inner conflict".

[6] By the term "working conditions", Lipsky means firstly some characteristics of the activities of street-level bureaucrats (discretion, uncertainty of conditions for decision-making, characteristics of clients, job stress, difficulty in measuring performance, etc.), secondly resources (capacity, demand, etc.), and thirdly the characteristic features of the culture of street-level bureaucracies (uncertain objectives, laws, regulations, accustomed rules, stereotypes and prejudices about clients and the expectations arising from them; see in particular *Lipsky* 1980: 27–70, 140–157.)

[7] Receptiveness to expectation conflicts arising from the equivocal working conditions of social workers is influenced by the theoretically justified approaches recognised by the professional community. If social workers embrace them while training for their profession, they are forced to cope with conflicts in practical situations between the theoretically justified expectations of these approaches and the expectations that arise from everyday experience of the personnel of the employing organisation. It is hence reasonable to assume that in practice, the selection and method of employing theoretically justified approaches is part of the process of coping with the dilemmas involved in the work with client. For example *Payne* (1991: 47 ff.), *Howe* (1991) and *Navrátil* (2002) dealt with the employment of theoretically justified approaches in practice.

[8] Although the term "dilemma" relates to choosing between two options, expectation conflicts and deciding on them may relate even to a higher number of expectations. The complexity of working situations and the comprehensive way in which they are perceived bring organisations' workers to more or less stratified expectation conflicts. These can result not only in "dilemmas",

A conflict with the surroundings sets in if the entity whose decisions matter under the rules recognised in the organisation[9] promotes an approach difficult to accept for frontline workers. For example, a case conference gives an order "to remove a child from the family", but the social workers insist that this "is an unreasonably drastic measure that will be harmful for the child in the long run". In this case social workers and the persons bestowed with authority and power[10] fundamentally divide upon the issue as to how to respond to a specific working event (such as the situation in the child's family).

It is not necessarily the difference between the expectation of the surroundings and the expectation of the workers that is the source of expectation conflict. The workers may experience discord between their own expectations in their minds. Let us envisage social workers in whose organisation the difficult deciding between the quantity of clients and responsiveness to their needs is routinely put off in the way described above. In such an organisation, nobody expects anyone to be equally responsive to all clients. Thanks to this social workers cope with their job stress and have no intention of changing established practice. Even so they may live with the feeling that things should be different. That were they perhaps more responsive to clients who are generally regarded as "less needy sluggards", some of these might learn to function more independently in social terms. This would be a case where the dilemma would not relate to conflict with the surroundings; it would be the result of an inner conflict between differing expectations of the workers. They expect that their job stress be manageable, and to achieve that they save energy by reducing the quality of their services for the "less needy". At the same time However they expect that those regarded in their organisation as the "less needy", who receive thriftier treat-

but also "trilemmas" to "polylemmas". However, *Lipsky* speaks just about "dilemmas". I believe that he does so for three reasons. Firstly, the usual language does not provide a summary denomination for a whole aggregate of situations that relate to deciding between various numbers of incompatible options. Secondly, it is simpler for him to reduce complicated complexes of thoughts to "binominals", and thirdly, he works with a tacit hypothesis that coping with "dilemmas" is governed by similar rules as coping with more stratified decision-making situations. If we accept this assumption, we may understand the "dilemma" as an agent within an aggregate of which the agent is a sectional element, and demonstrate with it what also holds true for coping with more stratified decision-making situations.

[9] This entity can be a formal superior or an officially established commission, but equally the collective of co-workers or an experienced colleague respected as a model competent employee, etc.

[10] For the notions of "authority" and "power" see Chapter 5.

ment, should be helped as well. Both expectations seem barely compatible and the workers therefore experience an inner expectation conflict, a so-called "battle of motives".

Whether frontline workers are exposed to a conflict with their surroundings or they experience a battle of motives, either case meets the first of the above prerequisites for the emergence of a dilemma – working conditions have brought frontline workers the necessity to cope with an expectation conflict.

Earlier in this text I presented the "moral sensitivity" of workers towards expectation conflict as the second prerequisite for the emergence of a dilemma. *Fleck-Henderson* (1991: 192 f.) uses this term for the ability "of reading a moral dilemma in a real situation" and being "conscious of the moral nature of the situation."

In the case of the battle of motives this prerequisite is met, because the inner expectation conflict is a display of awareness of its moral nature. The statements "to experience an inner expectation conflict" and "to perceive one's own conduct as morally controversial" can be taken as synonymous. If I place in my own thoughts two expectations against each other that I believe mutually cast doubt on each other, I have admitted to judging them in moral terms.

The presence of moral sensitivity is not so self-evident in the case of a conflict with the expectations of the surroundings. Whether the workers perceive the difference between their expectations and those of someone in their surroundings as morally serious depends on the context into which they place it. Some social workers take an indifferent attitude to the collision between the order "to remove a child from the family" and their opinion that this "is an unreasonably drastic measure that will be harmful to the child in the long run". They may believe that neither removal of the child nor leaving it in a problematic family will substantially change the child's fate. In this case the dilemma does not arise. Another group of social workers will perceive the removal of the child from the family as a step towards the child's deep emotional deprivation that in their opinion will result in irrecoverable and undesirable changes in the child's personality. This group of social workers – who are more sensitive in moral terms in this particular case – face a dilemma they will need to cope with somehow.

This does not necessarily mean though that they will agonisingly decide for each child in their care as to whether to "remove" it or not.

The identification of a dilemma by frontline workers does not mean that they take it as a matter of their responsibility to resolve the dilemma. *Fleck-Henderson* considers "identifying or constructing" a dilemma to be a process that proceeds its "resolving." He maintains that reading a moral dilemma in a real life situation "is very different from" resolving it. This suggests that a dilemma that has been identified will not necessarily be resolved. "It is possible that, when one is routinely faced with certain potentially difficult choices that were agonized over originally, a resolution becomes morally unproblematic by habit and justification." (*Fleck-Henderson* 1991: 188, 192) In this sentence *Fleck-Henderson* systematically defines the assumptions we can read between the lines in *Lipsky*.

Lipsky assumes that street-level bureaucrats "often enter public service with some interest in client-oriented work, embrace professional orientations that call for altruistic behaviour toward clients, and continually interact with clients, thus regularly confronting client characteristics and concerns" (*Lipsky* 1980: 144, see also 81 f.). Their approach to clients tends to be influenced by the myths of "altruism", "care" and "responsibility" as well as the expectation of the professional communities that their members "make clients' needs primary" (ibid. 71–80). "Those who recruit themselves for public service work are attracted to some degree by the prospect that their lives will gain meaning through helping others" (ibid. 72). I believe that these quotations can be interpreted as a display of *Lipsky*'s conviction that street-level bureaucrats – and social workers among them – tend to be morally sensitive to those expectation conflicts that are related to responsiveness towards the needs of clients. *Lipsky* therefore assumes that the second prerequisite for the emergence of a dilemma – moral sensitivity of frontline workers to expectation conflicts concerning work with clients – is usually met.

What *Lipsky* is doubtful about is the tendency of street-level bureaucrats to meet the third of the above prerequisites for the emergence of an importunate dilemma – to have the feeling of one's own responsibility for urgently making a difficult choice. He says indeed, that street-level bureaucrats "are functioning effectively and properly under the constraint they encounter" (*Lipsky* 1980: 82) and take "limitations in the work as a fixed reality rather than a problem with which to grapple" (ibid. 144). Hence, according to *Lipsky*, frontline workers are

morally sensitive and therefore they experience numerous dilemmas in their work with clients. Yet they do not consider themselves to be those to urgently make difficult decisions that ensue from these dilemmas and assume responsibility for them.

Although they are able to identify dilemmas, they try to make them slip their minds. They commonly employ approaches that weaken the importunate nature of dilemmas[11]. The resolving of "importunate dilemmas" is therefore rare in *Lipsky's* descriptions of social workers' practice. Instead *Lipsky* describes the dilemmas that are "latent" by their nature: although the workers know or at least suspect that they might be confronting a difficult choice between barely compatible options, they still live with the feeling that the choice does not need to be made urgently. Rather than being present, expectation conflict is impending. Although the moral sensitivity of workers to it is still present, it ceases to be the object of acute awareness. Sometimes it weakens significantly due to rationalisations we will discuss at a later point.

For example job counsellors, according to *Lipsky*, frequently find themselves unable to meet the expectations of their superior personnel from the perspective of success of unemployed clients in finding jobs. Actually the success rate significantly depends on circumstances the counsellors are unable to influence – in particular the situation in the labour market and the clients' qualities that are difficult to alter in the short run. Aspiring to a good rating, the counsellors prioritise those people when offering vacancies who have good prospects for success at employers, thanks to which they achieve a satisfying rate of success. Yet the feeling of a job well done may elude the counsellors, because they have been successful at the expense of clients with less chance for a placement and at

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[11] Although *Lipsky* does not state that street-level bureaucrats "commonly employ approaches that weaken the importunate nature of dilemmas", a reflection on his text leads to the conclusion that he allows for that assumption. This is obvious at the moment he says that he will "study the routines and subjective responses street-level bureaucrats develop in order to cope with the difficulties and ambiguities of their jobs". He follows up this statement by describing the typology of the ways in which street-level bureaucrats commonly ("in everyday life") cope with the tension between their idea of work with the client and the problematic working conditions. This typology describes three types of "habitual patterns" and "symbolic constructs", the purpose of which is "to limit", "to reduce" or "to make more acceptable" three types of "gap" – between demand and resources on one hand, between resources and goals on the other hand and finally between goals and that which is achievable. These "habitual patterns" and "symbolic constructs" are, according to *Lipsky*, a common part of street-level bureaucrats' practice, as he believes that knowing them allows to us to understand "much of the patterned behaviour of street-level bureaucrats and many of their characteristic subjective orientations." (*Lipsky* 1980: 82-83)

odds with the official requirement that all clients be given the same opportunities. Thus the counsellors are confronted with a dilemma of two expectations: "either to achieve the expected success rate or behave in an equally responsive manner to all clients". According to *Lipsky*, they manage to avoid this dilemma through "blaming the victims". The counsellors mutually affirm to one another that the less successful clients are hopeless, lazy and unwilling to work, and that working with them would be a waste of energy that can be dedicated to those who are more hopeful, diligent and interested in work. (*Lipsky* 1980: 107, 153) From this perspective the selection of the more successful ones seems to be a rational method of using limited resources. Choosing between success rate and responsiveness to clients seems to be less urgent, the feeling of moral failure ceases to be the object of everyday attention and delight in success and a good rating is no longer polluted by the feeling of misconduct.

A latent dilemma "treated" in this way "waits" in the minds of the workers for resuscitation of the circumstances that can restore it to an importunate dilemma. This "waiting" However – depending on the circumstances and the nature of the dilemma – may take years. If the means of avoiding the dilemma is successful, everything walks along the path of "out of sight, out of mind". This process can sometimes proceed to a point where the dilemma is entirely suppressed to the latent phase and nobody bothers any more.

The processes of coping with dilemmas are therefore hard to examine by means of interviews. Workers fail to talk about their latent dilemmas for two reasons. Firstly, they do not find them important if they are suppressed to their latent phase, and secondly they do not wish to talk about them. Workers are trying to suppress the dilemma to its latent phase in order to make it "out of sight, out of mind" rather than be "needlessly" reminded of it, which the researchers do by asking their inquisitive questions.

Rationalisations

In *Lipsky's* descriptions of coping with dilemmas, contemplations can be found on the fact that the approach that makes it possible to avoid an impending dilemma is justified in some way (*Lipsky* 1980: 82, 140, 153 ff.). In the language of this study, *Lipsky* alerts us to the fact that the practices instrumental in suppressing a dilemma to the latent phase are often barely acceptable in moral

terms as well as from the perspective of civil rights, political interests, professional regulations, or other aspects. Hence additional, secondary expectation conflicts arise for street-level bureaucrats to which they tend to be morally sensitive. The secondary dilemmas that so emerge are, from the perspective of frontline workers, the result of the practice they use themselves in their own interest. If they are reluctant to give up such practices, they have no other choice but to "rationalise" their use in some way (ibid. xiii, 141).

Goffman (1991: 50) describes "rationalisations" as thought stereotypes by means of which the helping workers can subsequently justify that what might seem incorrect is in fact desirable or acceptable for a reason defined by the rationalisation. Collectively recognised justifications of this sort legitimise either in the eyes of the workers themselves or in the eyes of clients as well as public authorities an approach employed by the organisation in the work with clients, which is debatable for some reason (ibid. 80-88, 330).

According to *Lipsky*, rationalisations rely on prejudices – in particular those prejudices that are related to clients' characteristics. Street-level bureaucrats embrace the prevailing biases of the society and along the same lines they summarise in a simplified way or hastily generalise the prevailing features of those categories of clients that show some identical characteristics (*Lipsky* 1980: 142, 155). Although such summaries are not entirely untrue, they often fail if we want to assume from them the characteristics of individual clients. The problem is that street-level bureaucrats "strongly believe"[12] in their validity for individual cases. This means that they assume and act in a prejudiced manner on their basis. (*Lipsky*, 1980: xiii, 142.)

Rationalisations are difficult to identify. Their advocates trust them and do not doubt that they are a faithful reflection of the actual meaning and "biography" of

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[12] This reflection of *Lipsky* makes it possible to distinguish between the notions of "stereotype" and "prejudice". Along these lines, a "stereotype" can be regarded as a stable idea that the presence of a specific "symptom" – an observable characteristic in a specific category of clients – is accompanied by the presence of other characteristics in the same category of clients. If a worker identifies a "symptom" in a specific client, the worker has two options. Firstly, if he or she finds it necessary to check if the symptom is actually accompanied in the client by the other characteristics anticipated by the stereotype, the stereotype remains a "stereotype". If, secondly, the worker assumes automatically that the other anticipated characteristics of the specific client are present based on knowing the symptom without checking the validity of the stereotype behaviour in that particular case, he or she perceives the client "in a prejudiced manner". The stereotype the validity of which has not been confirmed has become "prejudice" (i.e. "prejudiced stereotype"), because it has been used in a prejudiced manner.

their treatment of clients. To put it more accurately, over time people lose the ability to distinguish between the plausibility of subsequent justification of a practical principle and the original circumstances of its emergence.

Let us take the example of debtors' counsellors who will be discussed in Chapter 7. In 1980s the inrush of the unemployed made them attenuate the provision of long-term immaterial help and brought them to offer just short-term material help to their clients. Some were frustrated by the situation and left their jobs. Material help without the possibility of training the clients in promoting their interests by their own strength did not make sense in counsellors' opinions. Under the pressure of increasing job stress, the other counsellors resigned from earlier attempts to "activate" poor clients by organising a "social action". They decided to provide at least short-term "first aid" to the clients. They ceased to provide a combination of material and immaterial help and publicly justified this change by claiming that only thus can they help at least the neediest clients. They declared themselves to be "condemned to care for the poor" and decided that only "people who have predominantly material problems" would receive their help from then on, while people "who have predominantly immaterial problems" would have to appeal elsewhere. They claimed that this was their response to growing poverty. (*Laan* 1998a: 23.)

It is difficult to tell to what extent this public declaration was a display of an honest conviction. It is more than likely that for the fired advocates of "social action", the breakaway of "first aid" for those with material difficulties from the attempt to empower clients in the long run in their struggle for civil rights was at least difficult. We can therefore assume that the justification of the resignation to immaterial help by solidarity with the poor could be a subsequent justification of the change of approach necessitated by growing unemployment. The advocates of politicising social work usually regard the paying of financial assistance to be a tool for keeping the poor obedient. The question therefore creeps in as to whether they can possibly believe that they can help their clients by what they until recently considered to be "giving alms".

The problem is that the question put this way can only be answered by the above former advocates of political action – the authors of the assumed rationalisation. These would probably repeat the already mentioned justification that – as I assume – probably helped them suppress the difficult dilemma between the

original ideals of the political articulation of the interests of the poor and the loss of the possibility to patiently train, in their working hours, crowds of debtors in political resistance to banks. They could not accept the question of an external observer as to whether their arguments are a rationalisation of a fact difficult to accept. Had they done so, the dilemma they want to avoid would rise before them in full strength and the spell of rationalisation would pass. It might therefore be immoral to ask them about the actual grounds of their justification of the approach they have chosen.

Obviously, rationalisations are a hard nut for those who want to understand the reason for employing certain principles of work with the client. But there is no need to worry one's head about it. The purpose of getting to know the culture of a certain group of social workers is not to determine whether someone is deceiving his or herself or whether they have in fact changed their opinion. This task must be thrown away. It is more important and ethical to seek answers to three questions when learning to know an organisation: "What dilemma could the assumed rationalisation help to cope with according to the workers of the organisation?"; "In what and why, according to them, could the expectation conflict they probably attenuate through rationalisation, be sensitive in moral terms?"; "What do they think they could gain if they – as we assume – avoid the dilemma?" If we find answers to these questions, we will understand what working conditions the workers might find contradictory, why the same conditions could from their perspective bring the difficult choice between the incompatible options and why they might find it expedient to avoid the choice. This can help us understand from what standpoints the workers of the given organisation are used to perceiving their work with clients. In this way we will attain hypotheses on the culture of their organisation instead of becoming uninvited and incompetent judges of their conduct in an attempt to judge the plausibility of the justification of a practice.

The culture of an organisation as a collective manual for avoiding dilemmas

In his whole book about street-level bureaucrats *Lipsky* describes the ways of avoiding the dilemmas in work with the client as collectively employed behavioural as well as mental patterns of practice (see especially *Lipsky* 1980: 81–86, 225 etc.) and refers to them as organisational processes (ibid. 82, 144ff., 155f.,

etc.). It can therefore be said that *Lipsky* interprets habitual patterns and symbolic constructs that enable frontline workers to cope with equivocal working conditions and dilemmas of work with the client as the elements of the culture of the organisations[13] he calls "street-level bureaucracies".

Lipsky looks at the culture of these organisations from a specific standpoint. He understands it as a tool which allows the workers of street-level bureaucracies to maintain the dilemmas of work with clients in their latent, less urgent form.

Lipsky says that the patterns of routines and rationalisations used by street-level bureaucrats as "coping strategies" are "psychological adaptations apparently required by [their] jobs", they "arise in street-level work in response to job stress" and have "psychological importance" for frontline workers (ibid. 86, 140 ff., 151 f.). It can therefore be said that according to *Lipsky*, the culture of an organisation functions as prevention of the psychological stress that would accompany coping with importunate dilemmas.

A frequent and immediate choice between incompatible responses to the client and his or her problems would be extremely demanding for frontline workers in psychological terms. It is therefore understandable that street-level bureaucrats try to avoid this stress. They do this by collectively creating and routinely employing patterns of interaction with clients and rationalisations that allow them to push importunate dilemmas beyond the scope of everyday attention. This routine putting off or overlooking of impending expectation conflicts is "programmed" in the organisation's culture by means of stabilised habits and their justifications. Thus the culture allows the workers to avoid everyday repetition of psychologically stressful decisions between equally unacceptable or, alternatively, equally tempting options.

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[13] By the term "the culture of an organisation", I refer to "cultural bonds", i.e. fellowship relations relying on the collective consciousness of an organisation's personnel. By this "collective consciousness" I mean the joint ideas of the organisation's workers about values, goals and methods of work with clients, about clients and other relevant entities and about the conduct that should exist in mutual interactions among staff members and in interactions with other entities. Collective consciousness construed in this way allows the staff in the organisation to interpret in a mutually comprehensible way working events, ways of behaviour and responses of clients or other relevant entities to everything the staff members regard as worth attention in their work. Bonds based on collective consciousness rest in the fact that people in the organisation can expect that their co-workers will respond to the working life events in a way that is comprehensible for them. Thus they can mutually predict each other's reactions and complement one another by their actions or at least ensure they do not stand in the other's way.

The patterns of interaction with clients and their rationalisation, which make it possible for frontline workers in organisations to routinely avoid importunate dilemmas, become a common part of the approach of street-level bureaucrats to clients. The process of creating such practices and their secondary justification is at the same time a process during which the approach to clients and its key elements are created or become finalised. I am using here the term "approach to clients" for the stabilised and collectively recognised way in which helping workers are used to responding to the client. The key elements of the approach so construed are firstly the preferences[14] the workers try to achieve in treating their clients, secondly the stereotypes[15] from the perspective of which the workers perceive and interpret the characteristics of the clients, and thirdly the rules of behaviour[16] following which the workers are used to act during interactions with the clients and other participants in their life situations.

In terms of preferences, Lipsky builds on the assumption that the driving force in avoiding dilemmas is an attempt of street-level bureaucrats towards "making their jobs psychologically easier to manage" (Lipsky 1980: 141). It is also important for them "to retain a concept of their own adequacy in the job", which in their eyes means that they can "assert that they are doing what they think is best they can do" and that "they try to do a good job in some way" (ibid. 81f.). In order to fulfil these preferences, they categorise clients using simplified and prejudiced stereotypes, using which they justify the fact that they treat different categories of clients using different rules and provide to them services of variable quality. In this way they can offer to at least a part of the clients a "performance relatively consistent with ideal conceptions of the job" and retain the conviction that they are "capable of doing the job well". (Lipsky 1980: 151.) From this perspective, the approach to clients is the result of the process of coping with the equivocal working conditions, and the dilemmas and psychological tensions these working conditions bring in the eyes of frontline workers.

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14 By the term "preferences", I refer to the values, interests, goals and ideas on work with clients the workers in the organisation collectively regard as important.

15 By the term "stereotype", I refer here to stabilised, routinely employed concepts. These may be, but do not have to be, "prejudiced" (see page 13, note No. 12).

16 By the term "rules of behaviour", I refer to stabilised and collectively recognised ideas of the workers in the organisation about how to act in interaction with the other workers in the organisation, clients or other entities.

Avoiding dilemmas in social work service organisations

In the following chapters I will deal with the question of how, according to published research results, the prevention of frequently repeated psychologically stressful confrontation with the dilemmas of work with the client is ensured in the culture of social work service organisations.

The notion "social work services" refers to the fact that social workers usually accomplish the goals of their intervention using services they mediate instead of providing them directly. In doing so, they sometimes participate in accomplishing the intentions of other specialists, such as judges, doctors, etc. It is hence useful to discriminate between social work itself and the complex of helping services the social workers' activities are part of. In every individual instance, workers of various helping jobs[17] become involved in the operation of such a complex and in practice the complex contributes in one way or another to the accomplishment of the goals of workers from all these jobs. From this perspective, the following question can be asked: "How does a specific complex of services of various helping fields working with specific clients contribute to the fulfilment of the goals of social work?" This question is determining for the definition of the term "social work services". I will be using it to refer to specific complexes of helping services whenever reflecting on their operation from the perspective of this question[18].

When examining the "social work services" defined in this manner, the primary goal of social work will be for me, in accordance with the traditions of this field (see Bartlett 1970; Navrátil/Musil 2000: 138-145), the provision of help in coping with difficult life situations by strengthening the balance of interactions between the varied characteristics of clients (individuals or groups) and the varied characteristics of their social environment. Fulfilment of this goal depends on the ability of social workers to take into account the life situation of the client as a whole. Two derived, secondary goals of social work start here. The first one is to observe, during work with a specific client, the goals that are laid down on the

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17 Apart from social workers, the operation of helping service complexes can be participated in for example by psychologists, physicians and psychiatrists, lawyers, educators and tutors, counsellors of various focus, attendants, carers or personal assistants, and under certain circumstances also priests, judges, investigators or police.

18 The same complex of helping services could be analogically regarded as "medicine services" or "psychology services", etc.

basis of findings on the varied types of relevant barriers[19] to coping with difficult life situation by the client as well as on the basis of findings on connections between these barriers[20]. The second goal, which derives from the mutual conditionality of the varied circumstances of the client's life, is to ensure during work with the specific client a sequence of actions of those helping jobs the services of which are relevant for coping with the situation by the given client. Neither the social worker nor his or her client can indeed exist without co-operation with specialists from other helping jobs in overcoming individual parts of the complex of obstacles to coping with a difficult life situation (Musil 1999.)

I will use the term "social work service organisations" in this study for the "social work service agencies"[21] or "social work service teams"[22], the workers of which participate in various ways in the fulfilment of social work goals within the social work service complexes.

From Lipsky's perspective, social work service organisations defined in this way are a specific type of street-level bureaucracy. Some case studies of social work service organisations describe how their frontline workers cope with those dilemmas that Lipsky believes are typical for street-level bureaucracies. The second, third and fourth chapters are dedicated to them. Apart from this, the research of the culture of social work service organisations brings findings on coping with dilemmas not mentioned by Lipsky. These are dealt with in the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth chapters. The question remains as to whether these dilemmas have stayed beyond Lipsky's attention because they are specific for

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[19] These can be for example health barriers, psychiatric, psychological, economic, qualification, spiritual, value system, hygienic, relation, organisational and perhaps some other barriers.

[20] Most helping jobs preferably (although not always exclusively) deal with one of the individual barriers to coping with a life situation by people. It is usual that the helping specialist focuses on the compensation or remedy of one of the individual barriers to coping with life by an individual or group. The approach of social workers differs from this focus on the individual dimensions of the client's situation. The client's situation as a whole should be the object of their intervention.

[21] A "Social work service agency" is an employing organisation that provides social work services and employs workers of helping jobs for this purpose.

[22] A "Social work service team" is a group of workers from helping jobs who do not co-operate exclusively with employees of a specific, formally defined formation (agency or its part) in providing their services; instead they proceed jointly with workers of other parts of their agency or employees of other agencies in the interest of achieving a goal, solving a problem or bringing about an innovation. The "team" sometimes pursues goals that exceed the scope of common tasks, in which case its existence is connected with an officially declared or unofficially existing "project". However, "teams" commonly come to exist on the basis of co-operation prescribed by an agency or by legislation in supporting a task for the solving of which no separate department or separate agency has been set up.

the social work service organisations and do not apply to the operation of street-level bureaucracies in general. Whether the answer to this question is positive or negative, it is certain that researchers identify ways of coping with dilemmas in social work service organisations that are in many respects similar to the patterns of routines and rationalisations found by Lipsky in all street-level bureaucracies.

must sincerely ask himself or herself three questions: firstly, how does he or she actually act (i.e. "what he or she does" and "with what intentions"), secondly if they could have or should have done something differently, and thirdly, what circumstances of their decision-making have they taken into account themselves on their own will and what circumstances were they forced to take into account.

Horne has not described Sheila's and David's case with the intention to evaluate as the what extent the social worker's conduct is "wise" and "conscientious". I therefore cannot carry out a thorough analysis of her approach in terms of these two aspects. I believe however that even after cursory reading of the whole story one can say that the worker tried to proceed according to the principles expressed by *Laan*. She took Sheila's approach to her situation as relevant. She cautiously differentiated Sheila's interpretation and her own perception of the reasons for leaving Peter and failing to move into an apartment of her own. She unveiled the moment in which the general practitioner "sidestepped" from factual to normative discussion and "objectivised" his moral doubts about the proposed approach by his claim about the "lack of capacity to change of the nineteen-year old" personality. Even so she seriously dealt with the practitioner's argument. She tried to look for and use improvement potential in Sheila and accepted official intervention only when the situation seemed almost hopeless. And she formulated the official intervention in such a way as to preserve hope for Sheila's independent life with David. Together with her colleagues, she carefully weighed her intentions as well as less obvious circumstances that made David a child "for the register".

Yet the case brought her more trouble than pleasure. She could "merely" be satisfied with her trying to help Sheila in a "wise" and "conscientious" manner. But she certainly did not think that the purpose of social work was to live an easy-going life and to show magnificent results.

Conclusion – An Alternative to Avoiding Dilemmas

The authors of the research quoted in this study as well as authors of other research[51] almost unanimously present findings showing that the culture of social work service organisations "offers" their frontline workers "guidelines" for avoiding important dilemmas. Case studies show that the patterns of practice and rationalisations that act as these "guidelines" are created by frontline workers themselves and that ordinary, commonly applied patterns of interaction with clients are the result of their attempt to avoid the psychological consequences of difficult to solve expectation conflicts.

Before we give in to the tendency to generalise these findings, we should ask whether other ways of coping with expectation conflicts and dilemmas of work with clients are known. Does the culture of social work service organisations include coping with stressful choices between incompatible options that are not based on "avoiding" them? However rare they are, empirical examples of such strategies do exist.

In his article on social work under quasi-market conditions, *Laan* (1998b) described a solution by which professional social workers responded to the contract between their agency and the Municipality of The Hague.

The contract was signed in 1992. In order to be paid for services rendered, the social work organisation obliged itself to remove "obstacles to taking a steady job" and to motivate the long-term unemployed with psychosocial problems "to take up paid work or other 'socially useful activities'". The clients' welfare benefits paid by the Municipal Services would be reduced if they did not co-operate.

The social work organisation obliged itself to provide help to 400 clients annually "while guaranteeing a success rate of 60%". As Laan suggests, working under this contract, social workers were confronted with the tendency to be seen as technicians "carrying out goals established elsewhere", who "no longer need to think for themselves", seeking "the most efficient means to achieve the given goals".

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[51] Apart from the already quoted authors, coping with the dilemmas of work with clients and their avoidance are discussed, for example, by *Blau* (1965), *Hasenfeld* (1983: 402 f.), *Hadley/McGrath* (1984: 165 f.), *Howe* (1986), *Bok* (1988), *Morrissey* (1990), *Lipsky* (1991), *Savaya/Malkinson* (1997), *Brodkin* (1997) and others. An interpretation of the said authors' findings is presented by *Musil* (2004: 198-208, 216, 220 ff.).

Social workers rejected this view and decided that their primary task is "to counsel clients who have come up against a dead-end in their social function-ing" and that "activating clients can only be seen as a guideline [...] not as an absolute output criterion". In accordance with this view social workers refused to accept the pressure of a guaranteed success rate and preferred to offer help "based on the wishes and needs of the clients" and to protect workers by view-ing the contract as "an obligation to perform to the best of their abilities rather than to guarantee any result". Social workers feared they might come into a po-sition in which they would have to decide whether or not the Municipality should apply sanctions against clients who refused to accept counselling. They decide not to "make such a threat part of the counselling", because their "primary loy-alty lies with [...] clients, with their wishes and their needs."

This decision led social workers to negotiation with the other side of the con-tract. Gradually, they were able to change the Municipal Department's concept of a "positive output" of the service rendered by the social work organisation. Initially, the concept was strict: a client who "exists on the labour market" had been seen as positive output. Later, the Municipal Service accepted the follow-ing view of: "Once a client has finally plucked up the courage to tell someone his troubles, the good help must come quickly. This step is often a bigger victory for a client than going on a training course or finding a job."

Achieving this change in the terms of the contract, social workers were able to bridge the expectation conflict between the original definition of their task and their view of the needs of unemployed clients with psychosocial problems. So-cial workers were successful in changing directly the unsuitable working condi-tions established originally by the contract. Attaining this, they cancelled the cir-cumstance which could provoke their dilemma. Their view of the task became the same as the interpretation of their task by the Municipal Department.

If we compare the examples of avoiding dilemmas described in the individual chapters of this study with the story described by *Laan*, we may say that we have empirical descriptions of two types of strategy. One is based on avoiding the experienced dilemmas brought by conglomerate working conditions, while the other lies in an attempt to change uncertain working conditions and thus prevent the respective dilemmas from emerging and being experienced at all. My task is not to evaluate the contribution of both strategies or to stress the de-

sirability of one of them. I would like to draw a picture of social workers' reper-toire of the ways of coping with their difficult working conditions, to make this picture more comprehensive and to compare the basic principles of both strate-gies (see table No. 4).

Tab. 4: Comparison of the strategies of coping with the dilemmas of work with clients

strategy for coping with dilemma / comparison aspects	avoiding dilemma	changing conditions
response to uncertain working conditions	perceived as natural	must be removed
response to dilemma	perceived as natural	its emergence ought to be prevented
way of coping with the dilemma	apply routinely a pattern of interaction with client that makes it possible to avoid a stressful choice	achieve a change of conditions through partnership negotiation or by means of protest or direct action
response to ethical problems associated with coping with the dilemma	secondary justification, rationalisation of the action pattern used	remove reasons for non-respecting of the original ethical principles of the group

The actors in both strategies perceive their working conditions as contradictory and are confronted with an expectation conflict to which they are not morally in-different. From these perspectives their situations are similar. However, their re-sponse to the dilemma they are confronted with is different.

The actors in the "strategy of avoiding dilemmas" perceive contradictory work-ing conditions and the associated expectation conflicts as a given thing. In order to cope with this "given thing", they try to create and employ such a pattern of interaction with clients as will make it possible for them to avoid impending and stressful decision-making. If a secondary dilemma emerges before them con-nected with the perceived problematic nature of the practices of avoiding the original dilemma, they try to subsequently justify the use of such practices.

Social workers as actors in the "strategy of changing conditions" believe that the uncertain working conditions should be removed and that the emergence of an anticipated dilemma possibly aroused in them by these conditions ought to be prevented in this way. The social workers try to remove reasons for non-respecting the original ethical principles of the group, to create conditions so as to be able to act in accordance with such principles and not to be forced to ob-serve rules that would have arisen as a subsequent response to the imminent dilemma.

The available case studies present both types of instrument used by social wor-kers in their attempt to remove a dilemma by changing contradictory working conditions. *Laan* (1998b) describes the use of negotiation and partnership. *Mor-rissey* (1990) presents an attempt of civil rights movement members to use pro-test and what is called "direct action". A comparison of the findings of both au-thors leads to the supposition that partnership and negotiation may be success-ful as an instrument of changing contradictory working conditions. The case study of the protest describes failure of the attempt at change. *Morrissey* de-scribes an attempt of the protest actors to subsequently justify usefulness of the chosen approach by stressing other than the original, and less ambitious, goals that in fact have been achieved. (*Morrissey* 1990) Nevertheless, findings on this issue are few and they do not allow for any generalisations.

Whether partnership and negotiation, or protest and direct action become the instruments of change, the preconditions for using the "strategy of changing un-certain working conditions" are professional and ethical self-confidence, deter-mination to enter the space of political negotiations and ability to effectively op-erate in that space. It is possible that a lack in such characteristics among social workers and a lack in patterns of participative behaviour in the culture of social work service organisations may be an important reason for the lack of examples of the "strategy of changing uncertain working conditions" in the findings of so-cial work service practice research.

The question is however as to whether the lack of such examples in the litera-ture may be regarded as an indicator of their absence in social work service or-ganisations' practice.

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Coping With Dilemmas
Working Conditions And Interactions Of Social Workers With Their Clients

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