



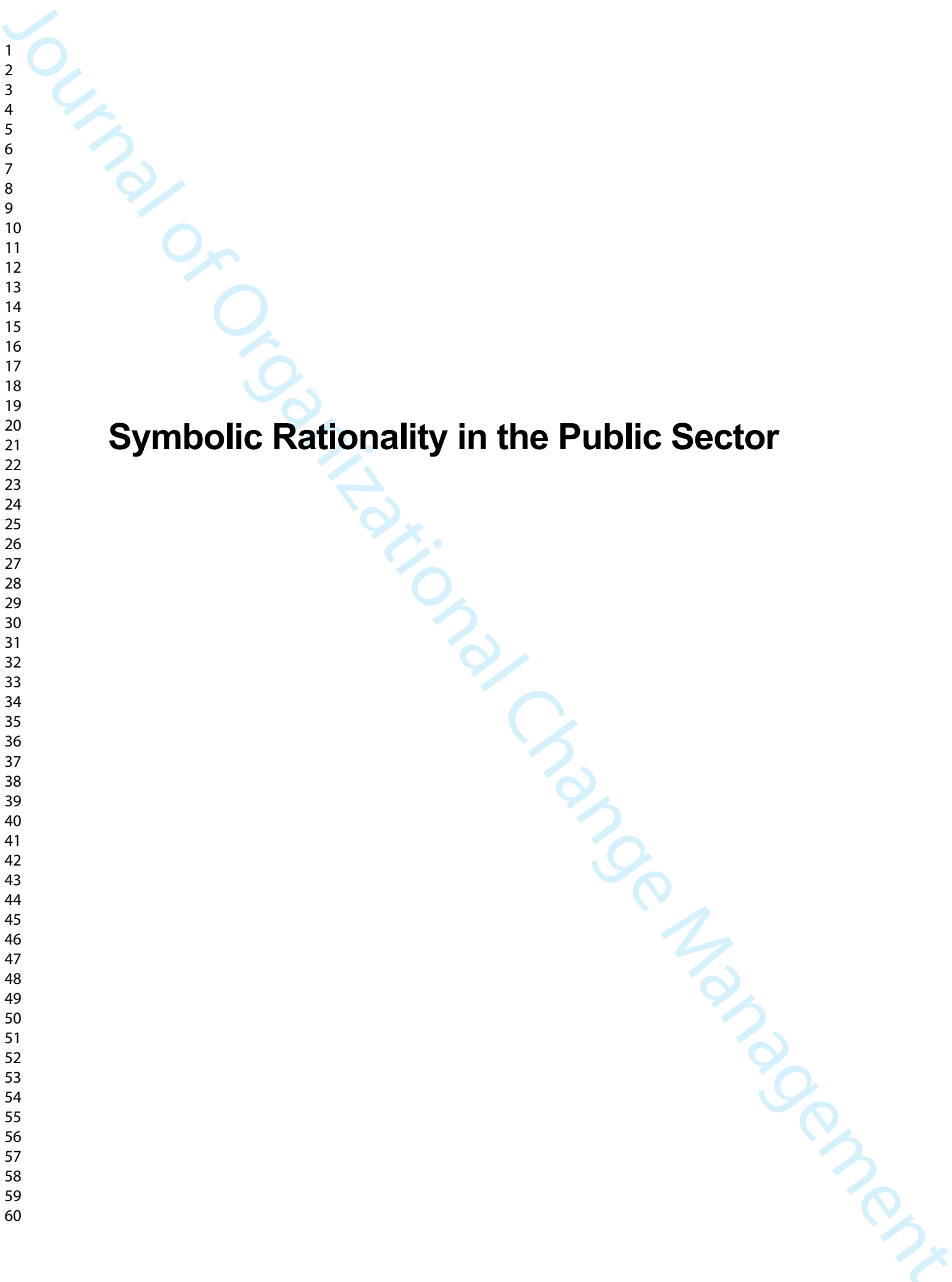
### Symbolic Rationality in the Public Sector

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# Symbolic Rationality in the Public Sector



## Abstract

The aim of this article is to describe work relations between leaders and counsellors in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV). The study focus on communication, control, work ethos, worldview and Digital Production Management. Leaders and employees in NAV have to combine competencies, practices and values, and, at the same time, focus on both professional interests and organisational goals. The study found (a) contradictory simultaneous work demands on leaders and counsellors, (b) communicative and regulative aspects of working in NAV, and (c) that leaders use DPM to control employees. The aspects (a) to (c) show a specific worldview in NAV. The study show a reciprocity, which means that leaders and counsellors need mutual knowledge and acceptance of each other's responsibilities and duties. It is fruitful to describe this situation in the public sector through the concept of symbolic rationality.

## Key words

Leadership, counsellorship, symbolic rationality, public sector.

## Introduction

Leadership research has focused, during different periods, on leaders' traits, behaviours and the situations in which leadership is exercised. Theories of leadership are today often hybrids of traits, behaviours and contexts (Yukl, 2010). This perspective also involves a hybrid professionalism of leaders, which "combines professional and organisational logics in mixed structures, mixed forms of coordination (by multiple governance mechanisms), mixed management and mixed professionalism" (Breit, Fossetøl & Alm Andreassen, 2018, p. 30). Yukl (2010, p. 26) defines leadership as "the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives". Working as a leader in the public sector in this context is subject to a number of challenges (Wallo, et.al. 2013). On the one hand, increasing digitalisation of the public sector with electronic processing gives the leader the opportunity to monitor employees (Power, 1999; Galic, Timan & Koops, 2017). On the other hand, the employee's integrity and rights are important areas which the leader must safeguard. At the same time, the leader must be the official who fulfils the social tasks of the business based on the Social Services Act, and the facilitator who helps employees guide clients to overcome their life difficulties. The leader must also address the conflict that can arise between the employee's work ethos, which means a strong will to help and do well for the user, and the organisation's financial and administrative requirements, which means complying with the budget and with laws (Lundquist, 1998; Byrkjeflot, 2008).

The category of employee has different meanings depending on the context it is used in. Unclear conceptualisation of how certain job characteristics, such as job meaningfulness, role-making processes and workload control, affect the reciprocal relations between leaders and employees. Leaders and employees drive one another and develop together in a work environment characterised by high acceptance of different opinions, which can be creative

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3 forces when people have autonomy in their work situation (Smith et.al. 2008). Good  
4  
5 collaboration involves both leaders and employees taking personal responsibility for their  
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7 work and the working environment (Arfaeya, 2008). When leaders and employees  
8  
9 collaborate, a smooth and innovative work environment is created where people dare to  
10  
11 experiment and fail. The support of leaders, autonomy, cooperation and the internal climate  
12  
13 are factors that influence an employee's ability to fulfil job demands (Smith et.al, 2008).  
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17 The aim of this article is to describe work relations between leaders and counsellors in the  
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19 Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV). We focus on communication, control,  
20  
21 work ethos, worldview and Digital Production Management. The article presents the concept  
22  
23 of symbolic rationality in an attempt to characterise relations between leaders and counsellors  
24  
25 in NAV. In the article, we try to answer the following research question: How are relations  
26  
27 between leaders and counsellors in NAV affected by demands in the intersection between  
28  
29 economic, administrative and client-oriented work tasks?  
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## 33 34 Theory

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36  
37 Transformational leadership and leader-member exchange (LMX)  
38  
39 Transformational leadership is a values-based style of leadership that distinguishes between  
40  
41 transaction and transformation (Burns, 1978; Yukl, 2010). This perspective differs from a  
42  
43 simplified causal and transactional understanding of leadership where desirable behaviour is  
44  
45 rewarded and undesirable behaviour is punished (Burns, 1978). Transactional leadership  
46  
47 involves an almost ideal mathematical causal understanding of cause and effect in the  
48  
49 leadership context (O'Neill, 1989). Transformational leadership emphasises inspiring  
50  
51 employees to do their best by developing a vision, using symbols and setting a good example  
52  
53 (Goodsell, 1977; Yukl, 2010). Leaders involve their employees and follow them up in a  
54  
55 personal manner that underpins their sense of meaning and mastery in relation to their job  
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58  
59 (Bass and Avolio, 1990a; Tummors & Knies, 2013). The use of transformational leadership  
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2  
3 today focuses on change and promotes values-based and relationship-based leadership, which  
4  
5 can reverse and possibly prevent leadership failure due to pure economic leadership  
6  
7 rationality (Van Wart, 2003; Kellis & Bing, 2015).  
8  
9

10 Leader-member exchange (LMX) is defined as a leadership practice linked to the  
11  
12 meaningfulness of and commitment to the employees' work situation (Tummers & Knies,  
13  
14 2013). Research shows that LMX affects work meaningfulness, which, in turn, influences job  
15  
16 outcomes such as lower turnover, higher job performance, higher job satisfaction and higher  
17  
18 perceived procedural empowerment (Dulebohn et.al, 2012). LMX describes the role-making  
19  
20 processes between a leader and each individual employee and the exchange relationship  
21  
22 between them. The theory focuses on "reciprocal influence processes within vertical dyads  
23  
24 composed of one person who has direct authority over another person" (Yukl, 2010, p. 235).  
25  
26 Different leaders will get along differently with different employees, and LMX describes the  
27  
28 quality of the relationship between a leader and an employee. The leader may have  
29  
30 "favourites" and less favoured members of staff. In low-LMX relationships, there is mainly an  
31  
32 economic exchange between leaders and employees, exemplified by employees investing  
33  
34 their working time to get money in exchange. High-LMX relationships are, on one hand,  
35  
36 characterised by mechanisms of reciprocity and social exchange which become effective  
37  
38 through mutual trust and employees' sense of being valued by their leaders (Tummers &  
39  
40 Knies, 2013). On the other hand, there is a concern that there will be less compliance if the  
41  
42 leaders' "favourites" get more benefits than they deserve (Yukl, 2010).  
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### 50 Symbolism

51 A symbol can be seen as a part of the interpretive aspects that make up organisational culture  
52  
53 (Hatch, 2018; Guiette & Vandenbempt, 2017). This is known as a form of symbolism in  
54  
55 which organisational structures, professional roles and leadership, beyond purely functional  
56  
57 meanings, say something about moral and values. Examples of situations, which are both  
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3 practical and symbolic, can be dialogues between leaders and employees, organisational  
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5 hierarchies and digitalisation of documentation procedures in the public sector. This article  
6  
7 introduces the concept of symbolic rationality in the context of organisational analysis in the  
8  
9 public sector. The concept was developed under a research programme on “Leadership and  
10  
11 client orientation in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV)”. In the  
12  
13 article, symbolic rationality is not discussed in relation to decision theory in particular, nor  
14  
15 does it take a purely philosophical approach (Cabantous, et.al, 2010). Instead, we take an  
16  
17 approach that involves endeavouring to understand how a category such as symbolic  
18  
19 rationality can be assigned meanings and how these meanings can be used to describe  
20  
21 relations between leaders and counsellors in NAV (Cf. Hacking, 1999).  
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### 27 Conceptual framings of rationality

28 Rational aspects of the NAV organisation can be studied from many different perspectives.

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30 One perspective is theoretical rationality, another is practical rationality, while a third is  
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32 rationality in connection with decisions. From a philosophy of science perspective, a majority  
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34 of scientists have discussed whether, and in what way, rationality has an ontological status as  
35  
36 something that is fundamentally human. Others believe that rationality is shaped and  
37  
38 constructed by different actors in different social situations (Audi, 2004). When rationality is  
39  
40 discussed in a public welfare organisation such as NAV, it is largely linked to reason and  
41  
42 what is not random (Weber, 2000). Weber (2000) distinguishes between two ideal types of  
43  
44 rationality. Goal rationality is when a leader chooses the most expedient means of achieving  
45  
46 the goal. Value rationality is how a certain way of acting has a clear intrinsic value that can be  
47  
48 justified from an ethical, aesthetic or religious perspective (Weber, 2000). Simon  
49  
50 distinguishes between subjectively and objectively rational decisions (Simon, 1976). Among  
51  
52 other things, he discusses whether a leader is subjectively rational when they do what they  
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54 believe is best, or whether the leader is objectively rational if the action is actually the best  
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option. Our discussion of rationality in this article is directly linked to the use of Digital Production Management (DPM) in NAV and to the ambition of establishing metric knowledge, through measuring and counting, which can be used to plan and optimise the organisation in a rational manner. However, DPM does not only appear to have a measurement function. It is interesting that a rational, technical and instrumental tool like DPM can also be used to develop “smoother” dialogues between leaders and counsellors in NAV (Ellingsen, Eriksson & Røn, 2018; Schaefer & Lynch, 2015). A “smoother” dialogue means that leaders can use administrative statistics in their relational interaction with counsellors.

### The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV)

NAV consists of the former unemployment agency, social security agency and municipal social services in Norway. The municipalities and the state cooperate on finding solutions for clients through 456 NAV offices. NAV has around 19,000 employees, around 14,000 of whom are employed by the state, while around 5,000 are municipal employees. The agency manages one third of the Norwegian state budget through arrangements such as unemployment benefit, sick pay, pension and financial assistance.

### Method

This article is based on two empirical studies from the same research project at the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) in the south of Norway called “Leadership and client orientation in NAV”. The research design led to a qualitative interview method being used to collect and analyse the opinions and experiences of the interviewees (Merriam, 2009). The aim of conducting the two empirical studies was to research experiences, interactions and processes, whereby qualitative interviewing is suitable (Crabtree & Miller, 1999).



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3 A critical comment that can be made about the method is that the interviewees are perceived  
4  
5 as being very conscientious and loyal to their employer. This may have affected their  
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7 response.  
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### 10 Sample

11 The sample consists of 32 qualitative interviews. The interviewees were recruited through  
12  
13 strategic selection based on two inclusion criteria: 1.) That they were leaders and counsellors  
14  
15 in NAV; 2.) That they were in the age range 26-65 years. In the first study, 16 interviews were  
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17 conducted with leaders, and in the second study, 16 interviews were conducted with  
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19 counsellors. The sample was recruited from both small and large NAV offices across the  
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21 county.  
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### 26 Transcription and analysis

27 The transcriptions of the interviews were in standard written language. The sum of the  
28  
29 interviews consisted of 36 hours of audio recordings. In total, the transcribed interviews  
30  
31 constitute 162 pages of text. The interviews were read thoroughly after transcription in an  
32  
33 attempt to establish a holistic overview of the content (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). The  
34  
35 interviews were then reread to find key words and bits of information that were interesting  
36  
37 and potentially important to answering the research questions. The tags and bits of  
38  
39 information were noted in the margin of the transcribed interviews in a process called coding  
40  
41 (Merriam, 2009). These codes were then systematised into groups in a process Merriam  
42  
43 (2009) calls analytical coding. This was an inductive process and the codes that belonged  
44  
45 together then formed the main categories in the study following a thematic analysis (Braun &  
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50  
51 Clarke, 2006).  
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### 54 Ethics

55 All the participants were anonymised and treated confidentially. In connection with the notice  
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57 of the interview, information about the study and a consent form was sent out to the sample.  
58  
59 The interviewees were informed about what was to happen before each interview. The audio  
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3 recordings from the interviews were locked in the project manager's office and stored on an  
4  
5 external hard drive. The transcribed material was only read by the researchers. The  
6  
7 Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) approved the project "Leadership and client  
8  
9 orientation in NAV" with project number 55412. In accordance with the approval, all audio  
10  
11 recordings were deleted at the end of May 2019.  
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## 14 15 Results and analysis 16

17  
18 Contradictory simultaneous work demands on leaders and counsellors  
19  
20 Leaders and counsellors use different rationalities to conceptualise their work situations in NAV  
21  
22 (Kociatkiewicz & Kostera, 2018). Leaders have to focus on economic goals, while most of the  
23  
24 counsellors want to do their best for the clients no matter the cost. The interviewees describe a  
25  
26 shift in NAV from quantity linked to finance and measurement of the total production, to quality  
27  
28 and the results of their work with the individual client:  
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31  
32 We see a shift towards focusing more on quality. Initially when NAV was established,  
33  
34 there was a huge focus on quantity and counts. We now see a shift where we are being  
35  
36 challenged on what results we achieve. Yes, finances and the numbers we have been  
37  
38 measuring have gone well, and this has enabled us to focus more on quality and the  
39  
40 quality of client meetings. Pulling the load together and good leadership are everything.  
41  
42 The long speeches are so bureaucratic. I want to work efficiently, properly and smoothly,  
43  
44 for our office.  
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47  
48 In an ideal situation, leaders and counsellors should take both economic efficiency and client  
49  
50 satisfaction into account. At the same time, optimising client satisfaction can affect strictly  
51  
52 economic goals. These contradictory demands make the leader's and counsellors' workday a  
53  
54 stress field in which the ability to meet one requirement does affect the possibility of fulfilling  
55  
56 another requirement negatively (McGivern, et.al, 2015).  
57

58  
59 There are huge expectations, both in terms of finance and savings, in professional results  
60  
and in many other areas. So there are ... I would say, expectations ... with a very wide  
breadth. We are expected to deliver equally on all fronts.

Another work demand referred to in the interviews is the ambition to develop a common NAV  
culture. The interviewees believe that the long-serving counsellors who experienced a sense of

1  
2  
3 mastery in their former agencies find it challenging to relate to new work demands. “It's one  
4  
5 NAV. Not state and municipality. Some of the long-serving counsellors in a department said  
6  
7 ‘we don’t like that’ and I then had to ask ‘who do you mean by we?’” This quote shows how  
8  
9  
10 NAV is developing new cultural patterns and how former organisational identity collides with  
11  
12 a new and uniform identity.  
13

14  
15 It seems strange that although it’s years since the office was established, the long-serving  
16  
17 counsellors are still obstinate in relation to some areas, which is not something we see in  
18  
19 the new counsellors. Nor has the management necessarily been instrumental in ensuring  
20  
21 the cultures blend together, because the structures have been fairly separate, and structure  
22  
23 has gone before culture. We try to merge the structures to change the culture.

24  
25 The above quote shows the role-making processes between leaders and counsellors and the  
26  
27 exchange relationship between them (Tummers & Knies, 2013). In NAV, counsellors from  
28  
29 the former agencies influence the newly-hired counsellors, in what we call “horizontal  
30  
31 dyads”. In the vertical dyad, the leaders’ attempts to have dialogue with both long-serving and  
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33 newly-hired counsellors will differ in quality (Yukl, 2010). Functional relationships are  
34  
35 characterised by mechanisms of reciprocity and social exchange, which become effective  
36  
37 through mutual trust and counsellors’ sense of being valued by their leaders (Tummers &  
38  
39 Knies, 2013).  
40  
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42  
43 Communicative and regulative aspects of working in NAV  
44  
45 The interviewees describe counsellors who wish to help and do their best for clients, and  
46  
47 those who are more concerned with enforcing the rules and not as interested in working  
48  
49 relationships with the users (Cf. Bjerger & Bjerregaard, 2017). At the same time, and  
50  
51 according to the interviews, these apparent contradictions are not perceived as conflicting  
52  
53 extremes because NAV needs a) counsellors who are able to communicate well with clients,  
54  
55 and b) counsellors who have the ability to enforce a regulatory framework. The ideal  
56  
57 counsellor is described as having personal qualities that combine both the communicative and  
58  
59 regulative aspects of working. Although ideally it would be possible to manage and measure  
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3 production as well as communication and relationships with the clients, several of the  
4  
5 interviewees expressed that relationships cannot be measured and that it is not meaningful to  
6  
7 put numbers on the guidance of clients. Several counsellors express a work ethos of wishing  
8  
9 to make a real life difference for the clients (Byrkjeflot, 2008; Lundqvist, 1998). This is not  
10  
11 simply a matter of talking to the clients because their life situation is difficult, but also about  
12  
13 taking time and recognising them as individuals. Symbolic rationality in NAV means that  
14  
15 both counsellors and leaders combine communicative and regulative aspects of working.  
16  
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19  
20 What I want in my office is counsellors who are just about in between. Who have the  
21  
22 ability to enforce a regulatory framework, not with pleasure, but they do it at least, and  
23  
24 who also have human characteristics and can communicate with clients. These are  
25  
26 personal qualities that I look for which give me the opportunity to shape them, as I want.

27  
28 Listening to them (...) it's tough to not be in work, it's tough to be sick. It's not that hard to  
29  
30 understand. I never think that you can measure everything. But they're measuring a lot,  
31  
32 which is fine, but I don't think our job is fully measurable.

### 33 Digital Production Management as a means of leadership control

34 In addition to DPM's technical and financial function of generating statistics about the work in  
35  
36 NAV, it also has a symbolic power that can be used to develop the dialogue between leaders  
37  
38 and counsellors in public agencies (Ellingsen, Eriksson & Røn, 2018). Several counsellors  
39  
40 assert that DPM is an auxiliary tool, while they also clearly refer to the control aspect of the  
41  
42 tool (Galic, Timan & Koops, 2017). This may concern the leaders' monitoring of the  
43  
44 counsellors in their work situations as well as managing the team. In NAV, the leader can also  
45  
46 use meetings to supervise the team in practice at both the group and individual level. According  
47  
48 to the counsellors, this can lead to stress in the work situation if the leader's ability to monitor  
49  
50 them leads to an increased workload beyond their normal working hours.  
51  
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53  
54 It makes sense, but it does constitute an element of control at the same time. There is a  
55  
56 risk of taking on extra work because I only have to do it this week so it doesn't appear in  
57  
58 DPM when she comes in and checks.  
59  
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3 Yes, but there's not always that much discussion at the meetings, it's more a matter of  
4 concluding that last week we only dealt with "six things out of 50". Things are  
5 summarised (...). I miss more discussion about how to make the team function internally.  
6  
7

8 The above quotes show a fairly strong critique of the monitoring aspect relating to DPM. At  
9 the same time, the counsellors recognise the need for control and overview of the amount of  
10 cases both they and the leader take on. They believe that the leader requires a degree of  
11 monitoring in order for the team to function optimally. The critique concerns the fact that  
12 surveillance can easily be misused and create a work overload. This is an example of how a  
13 technological tool such as DPM can function as a blueprint for the organisation of work in  
14 public agencies. DPM can thus be analysed as a cultural force field, or perhaps as a cultural  
15 container, in which many different types of factors in a society are dealt with and expressed.  
16 DPM in NAV is a blueprint which entails aspects of surveillance and control (Power, 1999;  
17 Galic, Timan & Koops, 2017). Symbolic rationality related to DPM in NAV means that  
18 leaders and counsellors are simultaneously aware of, and use, both the monitoring and  
19 relational aspects of the system.  
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35  
36 The symbolic rationality of work ethos and worldview in NAV  
37 Symbolic rationality in NAV presents a coherent description of leaders' and counsellors' work  
38 situation (Guiette & Vandembemt, 2017). Important parts of such a description are the social,  
39 political, moral and ideological circumstances in which NAV operates. Another important  
40 aspect, according to the interviewees, consists of fulfilling its social mission by meeting and  
41 helping the client. It is not just about economic efficiency or reducing dependency on financial  
42 assistance as much as possible:  
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51 I think that the social mission is safeguarded through individual conversations. Every  
52 single client is just as important, so it's our vision to give people opportunities, and that is  
53 what we do every day through the client conversations. It helps to meet the social  
54 mission. The social mission is met through the meetings with the clients.  
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3 Another part of the description is financial and concerns the central function of DPM . NAV  
4  
5 needs to clarify how measurements of counsellors' work with clients should be used and what  
6  
7 role DPM should have in the organisation. The central assumption is that the number of  
8  
9 parameters to be measured should be kept as low as possible, and that the results of the  
10  
11 measurements should be used to investigate what direct effects the efforts have had on the  
12  
13 client, rather than using them to check the work of individual counsellors (Schaefer & Lynch,  
14  
15 2015):  
16  
17

18  
19 It is naturally the social benefit that is important. Whether we have 10 or 50 on a result  
20  
21 sheet is not necessarily so important because it's the quality of the work performed that is  
22  
23 crucial. What Vågeng has said is that there is far too much counting, and that we must  
24  
25 switch to the effects of the measures. Balanced scorecards are fine, but we shouldn't have  
26  
27 to measure have too many indicators.  
28

29  
30 Another element of symbolic rationality in NAV concerns the character of leadership and the  
31  
32 cultures of the three previous authorities on which NAV was "built". The formation of a  
33  
34 coherent NAV culture provides the possibility to create work meaningfulness and higher job  
35  
36 performance (Dulebohn et.al, 2012). The interviewees describe how many former managers  
37  
38 were preoccupied with measurements and goal management and that they almost ignored the  
39  
40 relational aspect of leadership. This is an example of transactional leadership (Burns, 1978;  
41  
42 Yukl, 2010). The interviewees ask for more transformational leadership where they are  
43  
44 involved in decision-making, and where dialogue with their leaders underpins the sense of  
45  
46 meaning and mastery in relation to their job (Bass and Avolio, 1990a; Tummers & Knies,  
47  
48 2013). According to the interviewees, the current leadership strategies in NAV focus on  
49  
50 financial aspects and using DPM to measure work efforts, while also developing the relational  
51  
52 dialogue with the counsellors:  
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57 What leadership is in NAV? That's a difficult question because there are many ways to  
58  
59 talk about leadership. I think there's a link to the three previous cultures that make up  
60  
NAV. I don't think at the top level that we have properly become NAV either. I think the  
county director has played a role in how leadership is exercised in the different counties,  
and I don't know for sure, but different counties have developed differently based on the

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2  
3 type of county director they have, and which previous agency they came from. We had a  
4 leader from the previous social security agency who focused a lot on goals and results,  
5 and very little on other stuff.  
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8  
9 The symbolic rationality of NAV's activities also encompasses a national cultural element that  
10 does not have to be taken into account in the other Nordic welfare systems. For example, in  
11 Sweden over the past 30 years, the focus and volume of the production of welfare services has  
12 been centralised under national political control (Lundquist, 1998). Centralisation has led to  
13 the alignment of, for example, the Social Insurance Office and the Employment Service.  
14 Norway has a very strong municipal political mandate, which gives the welfare system a  
15 considerable decision-making mandate and a great scope of action at the local level. This  
16 means that a balance must be struck in the management of NAV between the central state  
17 level and the local municipal level. This is an example of hybrid professionalism of leaders  
18 and organisational logics in mixed structures (Breit, Fossetøl & Alm Andreassen, 2018, p.  
19 30). This has enabled the various municipalities to focus on parts of "their" NAV:  
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34 The expectations of me as a leader in NAV are a challenge because we have two  
35 management lines, and two different sets of expectations, from my counsellor in the  
36 municipality and my director in the county. This in itself is a suboptimal solution, but  
37 there are differences between my powers of authority on the municipal and state side. I  
38 have more professional influence on the municipal side than on the state side.  
39 Fortunately, this is resolved on some extent on the state side, but there is still a lot of goal  
40 management, while I set my goals myself to a much greater extent on the municipal side.  
41 There are two different budgets and two different bosses. It's a partnership where we meet  
42 annually and talk together, so we find out. It isn't a problem.  
43  
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46 The symbolic rationality of NAV consists of organisational, moral and evaluative aspects,  
47 which can be summed up in the term work ethos. The work ethos consists of the tone, quality  
48 and character of counsellors' and leaders' behaviour in the everyday work of NAV. The tone  
49 expresses the leaders' and counsellors' solidarity with and commitment to the client's situation.  
50 The quality and character of the NAV work ethos empowers and guides clients through the  
51 system. In NAV, another work ethos consists of the deeper job satisfaction attained by helping  
52 clients achieve a better everyday life (Byrkjeflot, 2008; Lundqvist, 1998).  
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3 I started working to make a difference for people, without necessarily solving every  
4 problem they have. And it's not like I've got time to sit and talk to someone just because  
5 they're sad, that's not what I mean, but it's a matter of actually taking the time to talk to  
6 them.  
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10 The worldview, strongly related to work ethos, shows the reality of NAV's social mandate,  
11 objective and functionality. The social mandate means that Norway deems it important to  
12 finance and run a welfare system for its inhabitants. The objective and functionality includes  
13 more people in work and activity, fewer receiving financial assistance, a well-functioning  
14 labour market, good services adapted to the client's requirements and a wholesome and  
15 effective work and welfare management. This is symbolic rationality expressed through a set  
16 of coherent ideas about NAV's activities and their consistency, and the sequence in which  
17 they are performed (Geertz, 1973). In an organisational theory context, NAV is not just a  
18 technically neutral bureaucracy; it includes the counsellors' and leaders' work ethos (Cf.  
19 Kociatkiewicz & Kostera, 2018).  
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### 34 Summary

35 Systems of value-laden symbols in NAV synthesise leaders' and counsellors' ways of  
36 performing their work based on their perception of the fundamental nature of the organisation  
37 (Tummers & Knies, 2013; Yukl, 2010). An example is the traditional perception of NAV as a  
38 bureaucratic and strictly production-oriented authority based on economic rationality, in which  
39 both leaders and counsellors behave in a calculated and rule-governed way towards the client  
40 (Brodkin, 2008). This study presents an organisational cultural pattern that challenges the  
41 bureaucratic and economic one (Breit, Fossetøl & Alm Andreassen, 2018). The pattern  
42 concerns both strictly economic matters focusing on numbers, and more relational and  
43 emotional aspects linked to the client (Ellingsen, Eriksson & Røn, 2018). Leaders and  
44 counsellors in NAV use the symbols as resources to communicate their ambitions, define goals,  
45 coordinate work and develop a collective identity. However, cultural symbols often carry  
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3 multiple and sometimes conflicting messages (Hatch, 2018). Leaders and employees in NAV  
4  
5 have to combine competencies, practices and values, and, at the same time, focus on both  
6  
7 professional interests and organisational goals (Breit, Fossetøl & Alm Andreassen, 2018;  
8  
9 Carvalho 2014; Blomgren and Waks 2015). The leader must measure the counsellors' work  
10  
11 performance and manage the direction and quality of the work (Bovens & Stavros, 2002). At  
12  
13 the same time, the leader must protect democracy in the workplace through dialogue with the  
14  
15 counsellor (Edmondson, 2019). The leader should also strive for economic efficiency, meet  
16  
17 clients' needs, have optimal administration and establish peace to work within and between  
18  
19 different professions working in the business (McGivern, et.al., 2015).  
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## 23 24 Conclusion

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27 The aim of this article was to describe work relations between leaders and counsellors in the  
28  
29 Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV). The study focus on communication,  
30  
31 control, work ethos, worldview and Digital Production Management. It presents the concept  
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33 of symbolic rationality in an attempt to characterise relations between leaders and counsellors  
34  
35 in NAV. The study tries to answer the following research question: How are relations between  
36  
37 leaders and counsellors in NAV affected by demands in the intersection between economic,  
38  
39 administrative and client-oriented work tasks? The study found (a) contradictory simultaneous  
40  
41 work demands on leaders and counsellors, (b) communicative and regulative aspects of  
42  
43 working in NAV, and (c) that leaders use DPM to control employees. The aspects (a) to (c)  
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45 show a specific worldview in NAV.  
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51 The study also found aspects of work ethos in NAV, such as a strong will to help and do well  
52  
53 for the user, and at the same time meet NAV's financial and administrative requirements  
54  
55 (Lundquist, 1998; Byrkjeflot, 2008). It is fruitful to describe this situation using the concept of  
56  
57 symbolic rationality. What, then, is symbolic rationality in the public sector? At a more  
58  
59 abstract level, symbolic rationality is a system of symbols with interacting meanings, which  
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3 are historically constructed, socially maintained and individually applied (Goodsell, 1977;  
4  
5 Guiette & Vandembemt, 2017). At a more tangible level, the study conclude that both leaders  
6  
7 and counsellors face paradoxical demands. The requirements include simultaneously  
8  
9 achieving economic efficiency, digital administration and control, positive effects for the  
10  
11 client and professional satisfaction. These demands have a negative effect on each other. If  
12  
13 one requirement is achieved, it will often have a negative effect on another. This  
14  
15 organisational logic needs a reciprocal working relationship between leaders and counsellors.  
16  
17 Reciprocity in this context means that leaders and counsellors need mutual knowledge and  
18  
19 acceptance of each other's responsibilities and duties. These simultaneous contradictory  
20  
21 demands are at the heart of symbolic rationality in the public sector.  
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27 Another conclusion is linked to counsellors in NAV, and, by categorising their work  
28  
29 performance as counsellorship, the study indicate aspects that can contribute to reframing the  
30  
31 way counsellors conduct their work. Firstly, counsellorship can be about meeting the client  
32  
33 with respect and recognition. Secondly, it can be about interacting with colleagues and leaders  
34  
35 in the same way. Counsellorship is thus close to leadership, which, in short, means that  
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37 dialogue, recognition and transparency are key values in the reciprocal function of both roles.  
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42 Through symbolic rationality, the study has identified the possibility for further research on  
43  
44 the hybrid professionalism of leadership and counsellorship, at three levels in the  
45  
46 ambidextrous public sector. The first is the epistemological level, where the concept sets  
47  
48 limits on how a social situation such as NAV can be spoken about and understood. A second  
49  
50 level is the theoretical level, where categories and logics can be formed that are seen as being  
51  
52 applicable to work in NAV. The third and final level is the practical level, where the concept  
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54 of symbolic rationality and the meanings connected with it shape leaders' and counsellors'  
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56 professional practice in the public sector.  
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## Symbolic Rationality in the Public Sector

## Abstract

The aim of this article is to describe work relations between leaders and counsellors in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV). The study focus on communication, control, work ethos, worldview and Digital Production Management. Leaders and employees in NAV have to combine competencies, practices and values, and, at the same time, focus on both professional interests and organisational goals. The study found (a) that leaders use DPM to control employees, (b) communicative and regulative aspects of working in NAV, (c) contradictory simultaneous work demands on leaders and counsellors, and (d) the symbolic rationality of work in NAV. The aspects (a) to (d) show a specific worldview in NAV. The study show a reciprocity, which means that leaders and counsellors need mutual knowledge and acceptance of each other's responsibilities and duties. It is fruitful to describe this situation in the public sector through the concept of symbolic rationality.

## Key words

Leadership, counsellorship, symbolic rationality, public sector, reciprocal, ambidextrous.



## Introduction

Leadership research has focused, during different periods, on leaders' traits, behaviours and the situations in which leadership is exercised. Theories of leadership are today often hybrids of traits, behaviours and contexts (Yukl & Gardner, 2020). This perspective also involves a hybrid professionalism of leaders, which "combines professional and organisational logics in mixed structures, mixed forms of coordination (by multiple governance mechanisms), mixed management and mixed professionalism" (Breit, Fossetøl & Alm Andreassen, 2018, p. 30).

Yukl & Gardner (2020, p. 26) defines leadership as "the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives". Working as a leader in the public sector in this context is subject to a number of challenges (Wallo, et.al. 2013). On the one hand, increasing digitalisation of the public sector with electronic processing gives the leader the opportunity to monitor employees (Power, 1999; Galic, Timan & Kooops, 2017). On the other hand, the employee's integrity and rights are important areas which the leader must safeguard. At the same time, the leader must be the official who fulfils the social tasks of the business based on the Social Services Act, and the facilitator who helps employees guide clients to overcome their life difficulties. The leader must also address the conflict that can arise between the employee's work ethos, which means a strong will to help and do well for the user, and the organisation's financial and administrative requirements, which means complying with the budget and with laws (Lundquist, 1998; Byrkjeflot, 2008).

The category of employee has different meanings depending on the context it is used in.

Unclear conceptualisation of how certain job characteristics, such as job meaningfulness, role-making processes and workload control, affect the reciprocal relations between leaders and employees. Leaders and employees drive one another and develop together in a work environment characterised by high acceptance of different opinions, which can be creative

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3 forces when people have autonomy in their work situation (Smith et.al. 2008). Good  
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5 collaboration involves both leaders and employees taking personal responsibility for their  
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7 work and the working environment (Arfaeya, 2008). When leaders and employees  
8  
9 collaborate, a smooth and innovative work environment is created where people dare to  
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11 experiment and fail. The support of leaders, autonomy, cooperation and the internal climate  
12  
13 are factors that influence an employee's ability to fulfil job demands (Smith et.al, 2008).  
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17 The aim of this article is to describe work relations between leaders and counsellors in the  
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19 Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV). We focus on communication, control,  
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21 work ethos, worldview and Digital Production Management. The article presents the concept  
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23 of symbolic rationality in an attempt to characterise relations between leaders and counsellors  
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25 in NAV. In the article, we try to answer the following research question: How are relations  
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27 between leaders and counsellors in NAV affected by symbolic rationalities in the intersection  
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29 between economic, administrative and client-oriented work tasks?  
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## 33 34 Theory

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37 Transformational leadership and leader-member exchange (LMX)  
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39 Transformational leadership is a values-based style of leadership that distinguishes between  
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41 transaction and transformation (Burns, 1978; Yukl & Gardner, 2020). This perspective differs  
42  
43 from a simplified causal and transactional understanding of leadership where desirable  
44  
45 behaviour is rewarded and undesirable behaviour is punished (Burns, 1978). Transactional  
46  
47 leadership involves an almost ideal mathematical causal understanding of cause and effect in  
48  
49 the leadership context (O'Neill, 1989). Transformational leadership emphasises inspiring  
50  
51 employees to do their best by developing a vision, using symbols and setting a good example  
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53 (Goodsell, 1977; Yukl & Gardner, 2020). Leaders involve their employees and follow them  
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55 up in a personal manner that underpins their sense of meaning and mastery in relation to their  
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57 job (Bass and Avolio, 1990a; Tummers & Knies, 2013). The use of transformational  
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3 leadership today focuses on change and promotes values-based and relationship-based  
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5 leadership, which can reverse and possibly prevent leadership failure due to pure economic  
6  
7 leadership rationality (Van Wart, 2003; Kellis & Bing, 2015).  
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10 Leader-member exchange (LMX) is defined as a leadership practice linked to the  
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12 meaningfulness of and commitment to the employees' work situation (Tummers & Knies,  
13  
14 2013). Research shows that LMX affects work meaningfulness, which, in turn, influences job  
15  
16 outcomes such as lower turnover, higher job performance, higher job satisfaction and higher  
17  
18 perceived procedural empowerment (Dulebohn et.al, 2012). LMX describes the role-making  
19  
20 processes between a leader and individual employees and the exchange relationship between  
21  
22 them (Yukl & Gardner, 2020, p. 276). The theory focuses on "reciprocal influence processes  
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24 within vertical dyads composed of one person who has direct authority over another person"  
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26 (Yukl, 2010, p. 235). Different leaders will get along differently with different employees,  
27  
28 and LMX describes the quality of the relationship between a leader and an employee. The  
29  
30 leader may have "favourites" and less favoured members of staff. In low-LMX relationships,  
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32 there is mainly an economic exchange between leaders and employees, exemplified by  
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34 employees investing their working time to get money in exchange. High-LMX relationships  
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36 are, on one hand, characterised by mechanisms of reciprocity and social exchange which  
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38 become effective through mutual trust and employees' sense of being valued by their leaders  
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40 (Tummers & Knies, 2013). On the other hand, there is a concern that there will be less  
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42 compliance if the leaders' "favourites" get more benefits than they deserve (Yukl & Gardner,  
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44 2020).  
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52 Public sector is an ambidextrous organisation with substantial goal complexity and  
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54 ambiguity (Zacher & Rosing, 2015; Tummers & Knies, 2013). So how leaders influence job  
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56 characteristics, such as job meaningfulness, role-making processes and workload control in  
57  
58 the intersection between LMX-exchange and organisational commitment is crucial.  
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3 Complexity in the public sector requires leaders who balance their administrative practices  
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5 with the adaptive practices needed to respond to dynamic circumstances and tensions in their  
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7 leadership (Murphy, Rhodes, Meek & Denyer, 2017). Tensions who raises in the intersection  
8  
9 between relations, economics, change and the symbols who represents these tensions  
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11  
12 (Ellingsen, Eriksson & Røn, 2018).  
13

### 14 15 Symbolism

16 A symbol can be seen as a part of the interpretive aspects that make up organisational culture  
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18 (Hatch, 2018; Guette & Vandenbempt, 2017). This is known as a form of symbolism in  
19  
20 which organisational structures, professional roles and leadership, beyond purely functional  
21  
22 meanings, say something about moral and values. Examples of situations, which are both  
23  
24 practical and symbolic, can be dialogues between leaders and employees, organisational  
25  
26 hierarchies and digitalisation of documentation procedures in the public sector. Symbols in  
27  
28 organisations may also be tools in the decision process, in which there are assumptions,  
29  
30 values, goals, creation of meaning and a purpose for symbolic activity that differ between  
31  
32 manipulation and inspiration (Mason, 1994; Yukl & Gardner, 2020). Symbols are socially  
33  
34 formed and the meanings related to them are interpreted through three mechanisms:  
35  
36 externalization, objectification, and internalization (Hatch, 2018). Externalization explain how  
37  
38 meanings are carried and communicated through symbols. Objectification explain how  
39  
40 intersubjectively produced understandings appear to be objectively real. Internalization  
41  
42 explain how one “accepts the intersubjectively externalized and objectified understandings of  
43  
44 a social group as real” (Hatch, 2018, p. 40). A weakness of the symbolic perspective is that it  
45  
46 does not emphasize the wide array of knowledge processes, and how individuals can learn  
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48 implicit relations among objects and store it in the memory (Lord & Shondrick, 2011).  
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56 Leaders and employees in the public sector have a strong work ethos connected to symbols as  
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58 democracy, social responsibility, rule of law, and equal treatment of the citizens (Lundquist,  
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3 1998; Byrkjeflot, 2008). These symbols and the meanings related to them are socialized  
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5 through the social formation of the public sector. This article introduces the concept of  
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7 symbolic rationality in the context of organisational analysis in the public sector. The concept  
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9 was developed under a research programme on “Leadership and client orientation in the  
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11 Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV)”. In the article, symbolic rationality is  
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13 not discussed in relation to decision theory in particular, nor does it take a purely  
14  
15 philosophical approach (Cabantous, et.al, 2010). Instead, we take an approach that involves  
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17 endeavouring to understand how a category such as symbolic rationality can be assigned  
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19 meanings and how these meanings can be used to describe relations between leaders and  
20  
21 counsellors in NAV (Cf. Hacking, 1999).  
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#### 26 Dynamic nominalism as an epistemology of work in the public sector

27 The article’s starting points can be linked to dynamic nominalism that is fruitful to use when,  
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29 as a researcher, you have a combined relativistic and problematic approach in trying to  
30  
31 describe and understand work as leaders and counsellors in the public sector. Dynamic  
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33 nominalism understands the connection between reality and symbols to talk about it with as  
34  
35 relational. The way we talk about a social phenomenon, such as work in the public sector,  
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37 with a specific set of categories (symbols) gives us a limited set of possibilities for action  
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39 (Hacking, 1999). Furthermore, dynamic nominalism is a key starting point for those  
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41 researchers who use “constructionism” as a framework for comprehension in their studies  
42  
43 (Hacking, 1999). This article does not have a “constructionism” approach, as there are a  
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45 number of problematic circumstances in the use of “constructionism” embedded in the  
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47 concept itself. A first problematic circumstance is covered by the implicit intentionality that  
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49 the term “constructionism” indicates. This implies that behind each constructed socio-cultural  
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51 phenomenon, in this case, work in the public sector, there is a specific set of actors, or forces  
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53 that have specific intentions with the design. To understand the socio-cultural phenomenon  
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3 means to identify the different actors and their intentions. Intentionality also holds a  
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5 metaphysical aspect, meaning that actors, powers and intentions are not part of work in public  
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7 sector as a socio-cultural phenomenon, but they are located beyond it. Another problematic  
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9 circumstance with “constructionism” as an analytical concept is that it both confronts and  
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11 appeals to a machine metaphor in understanding the public sectors internal logic and external  
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13 touch points. The understanding of both public sector and work in it, as machine mechanics  
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15 excludes the possibility of generating knowledge about both in many cases, amorphous,  
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17 inconsistent, illogical and paradoxical character, since strict engineering understanding  
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19 regards these as anomalies. To understand work in the public sector with a machine metaphor,  
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21 as the use of “constructionism” indicates, attributes a strong ontological status, which means  
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23 that it has a clear temporal starting point, a clear spatial location as well as a clear and  
24  
25 delimited material body. This also distracts the attention from the ambidextrous and  
26  
27 paradoxical character of work in the public sector, which appears to be central aspects in an  
28  
29 attempt to create knowledge about the relation between symbolism and work (Cf. Hacking,  
30  
31 1999).  
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### 38 Conceptual framings of rationality

39 Rational aspects of the NAV organisation can be studied from many different perspectives.

40  
41 One perspective is theoretical rationality, another is practical rationality, while a third is  
42  
43 rationality in connection with decisions. From a philosophy of science perspective, a majority  
44  
45 of scientists have discussed whether, and in what way, rationality has an ontological status as  
46  
47 something that is fundamentally human. Others believe that rationality is shaped and  
48  
49 constructed by different actors in different social situations (Audi, 2004). When rationality is  
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51 discussed in a public welfare organisation such as NAV, it is largely linked to reason and  
52  
53 what is not random (Weber, 2000). Weber (2000) distinguishes between two ideal types of  
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55 rationality. Goal rationality is when a leader chooses the most expedient means of achieving  
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3 the goal. Value rationality is how a certain way of acting has a clear intrinsic value that can be  
4 justified from an ethical, aesthetic or religious perspective (Weber, 2000). Simon  
5 distinguishes between subjectively and objectively rational decisions (Simon, 1976). Among  
6 other things, he discusses whether a leader is subjectively rational when they do what they  
7 believe is best, or whether the leader is objectively rational if the action is actually the best  
8 option. Our discussion of rationality in this article is directly linked to the use of Digital  
9 Production Management (DPM) in NAV and to the ambition of establishing metric  
10 knowledge, through measuring and counting, which can be used to plan and optimise the  
11 organisation in a rational manner. However, DPM does not only appear to have a  
12 measurement function. It is interesting that a rational, technical and instrumental tool like  
13 DPM can also be used to develop “smoother” dialogues between leaders and counsellors in  
14 NAV (Ellingsen, Eriksson & Røn, 2018; Schaefer & Lynch, 2015). A “smoother” dialogue  
15 means that leaders can use administrative statistics in their relational interaction with  
16 counsellors.

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36 Traditional leadership research, such as transformational leadership and leader-member-  
37 exchange, has an epistemological starting point, with a rational basis. At the same time,  
38 today's public sector is paradoxical and inconsistent. Many of the established theories are also  
39 superior and say little about leadership in practice. There seems to be a research gap here  
40 between today's leadership practice and the established overall theories. In this article, we try  
41 to elaborate NAV practices with a new epistemology that symbolic rationality is central to.  
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50 The intention is to bridge the gap between superior theory and practice in NAV.

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52  
53 The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV)

54 NAV consists of the former unemployment agency, social security agency and municipal  
55 social services in Norway. The municipalities and the state cooperate on finding solutions for  
56 clients through 456 NAV offices. NAV has around 19,000 employees, around 14,000 of  
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3 whom are employed by the state, while around 5,000 are municipal employees. The agency  
4  
5 manages one third of the Norwegian state budget through arrangements such as  
6  
7 unemployment benefit, sick pay, pension and financial assistance.  
8  
9

## 10 11 Method

12 This article is based on two empirical studies from the same research project at the Norwegian  
13  
14 Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) in the south of Norway called “Leadership and  
15  
16 client orientation in NAV”. The research design led to the use of semi-structured qualitative  
17  
18 interviews to collect and analyse the opinions and experiences of the interviewees (Merriam,  
19  
20 2009). The aim of conducting the two empirical studies was to research experiences,  
21  
22 interactions and processes, whereby qualitative interviewing is suitable (Crabtree & Miller,  
23  
24 1999).  
25  
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28  
29 A critical comment that can be made about the method is that the interviewees are perceived  
30  
31 as being very conscientious and loyal to their employer. This may have affected their  
32  
33 response.  
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## 36 37 Sample

38 The sample consists of 32 qualitative interviews. The interviewees were recruited through  
39  
40 strategic selection based on two inclusion criteria: 1.) That they were leaders and counsellors  
41  
42 in NAV; 2.) That they were in the age range 26-65 years. In the first study, 16 interviews were  
43  
44 conducted with leaders, and in the second study, 16 interviews were conducted with  
45  
46 counsellors. The sample was recruited from both small and large NAV offices across the  
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48 county.  
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## 52 53 Transcription and analysis

54 The transcriptions of the interviews were in standard written language. The sum of the  
55  
56 interviews consisted of 36 hours of audio recordings. In total, the transcribed interviews  
57  
58 constitute 162 pages of text. The interviews were read thoroughly after transcription in an  
59  
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1  
2  
3 attempt to establish a holistic overview of the content (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). The  
4  
5 interviews were then reread to find key words and bits of information that were interesting  
6  
7 and potentially important to answering the research questions. The tags and bits of  
8  
9 information were noted in the margin of the transcribed interviews in a process called coding  
10  
11 (Merriam, 2009). These codes were then systematised into groups in a process Merriam  
12  
13 (2009) calls analytical coding. This was an inductive process and the codes that belonged  
14  
15 together then formed the main categories in the study following a thematic analysis (Braun &  
16  
17 Clarke, 2006). Both researchers were involved in the manual coding which reduced the risk  
18  
19 of unbiasedness.  
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#### 24 Ethics

25 All the participants were anonymised and treated confidentially. In connection with the notice  
26  
27 of the interview, information about the study and a consent form was sent out to the sample.  
28  
29 The interviewees were informed about what was to happen before each interview. The audio  
30  
31 recordings from the interviews were locked in the project manager's office and stored on an  
32  
33 external hard drive. The transcribed material was only read by the researchers. The  
34  
35 Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) approved the project "Leadership and client  
36  
37 orientation in NAV" with project number 55412. In accordance with the approval, all audio  
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39 recordings were deleted at the end of May 2019.  
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## Results and analysis

Table 1 Main and underlying themes

<b>Main theme 1</b>	<b>Digital production management for control and dialogue</b>
Underlying theme	The symbolic power of digital production management
Underlying theme	Misuse of surveillance create work overload
Underlying theme	Symbolic rationality of DPM entails surveillance and relations
<b>Main theme 2</b>	<b>Communicative and regulative aspects of working in NAV</b>
Underlying theme	Combination of regulation and communication
Underlying theme	Enforcing rules and do best for client
Underlying theme	Contradicting demands not conflicting
<b>Main theme 3</b>	<b>Contradictory simultaneous work demands</b>
Underlying theme	From administrative measurement to client effects
Underlying theme	Exchange role-making processes between leaders and counsellors
Underlying theme	Functional reciprocal relationships based on trust
<b>Main theme 4</b>	<b>The symbolic rationality of work in NAV</b>
Underlying theme	Symbolic rationality of NAV are summed up in the term work ethos.
Underlying theme	The worldview shows the reality of NAV's social mandate, objective and functionality.
Underlying theme	Symbolic rationality in NAV presents leaders' and counsellors' work situation

### Digital Production Management as a means of leadership control

In addition to DPM's technical and financial function of generating statistics about the work in NAV, it also has a symbolic power that can be used to develop the dialogue between leaders and counsellors in public agencies (Ellingsen, Eriksson & Røn, 2018). Several counsellors assert that DPM is an auxiliary tool, while they also clearly refer to the control aspect of the tool (Galic, Timan & Koops, 2017). This may concern the leaders' monitoring of the counsellors in their work situations as well as managing the team. In NAV, the leader can also use meetings to supervise the team in practice at both the group and individual level. According to the counsellors, this can lead to stress in the work situation if the leader's ability to monitor them leads to an increased workload beyond their normal working hours.

It makes sense, but it does constitute an element of control at the same time. There is a risk of taking on extra work because I only have to do it this week so it doesn't appear in DPM when she comes in and checks.

Yes, but there's not always that much discussion at the meetings, it's more a matter of concluding that last week we only dealt with "six things out of 50". Things are summarised (...). I miss more discussion about how to make the team function internally.

The above quotes show a fairly strong critique of the monitoring aspect relating to DPM. At the same time, the counsellors recognise the need for control and overview of the amount of cases both they and the leader take on. They believe that the leader requires a degree of monitoring in order for the team to function optimally. The critique concerns the fact that surveillance can easily be misused and create a work overload. This is an example of how a technological tool such as DPM can function as a blueprint for the organisation of work in public agencies. DPM can thus be analysed as a cultural force field, or perhaps as a cultural container, in which many different types of factors in a society are dealt with and expressed. DPM in NAV is a blueprint which entails aspects of surveillance and control (Power, 1999; Galic, Timan & Koops, 2017). Symbolic rationality related to DPM in NAV means that

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2  
3 leaders and counsellors are simultaneously aware of, and use, both the monitoring and  
4  
5 relational aspects of the system.  
6

#### 7 Communicative and regulative aspects of working in NAV

8 The interviewees describe counsellors who wish to help and do their best for clients, and  
9  
10 those who are more concerned with enforcing the rules and not as interested in working  
11  
12 relationships with the users (Cf. Bjerger & Bjerregaard, 2017). At the same time, and  
13  
14 according to the interviews, these apparent contradictions are not perceived as conflicting  
15  
16 extremes because NAV needs a) counsellors who are able to communicate well with clients,  
17  
18 and b) counsellors who have the ability to enforce a regulatory framework. The ideal  
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20 counsellor is described as having personal qualities that combine both the communicative and  
21  
22 regulative aspects of working. Although ideally it would be possible to manage and measure  
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24 production as well as communication and relationships with the clients, several of the  
25  
26 interviewees expressed that relationships cannot be measured and that it is not meaningful to  
27  
28 put numbers on the guidance of clients. Several counsellors express a work ethos of wishing  
29  
30 to make a real life difference for the clients (Byrkjeflot, 2008; Lundqvist, 1998). This is not  
31  
32 simply a matter of talking to the clients because their life situation is difficult, but also about  
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34 taking time and recognising them as individuals. Symbolic rationality in NAV means that  
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36 both counsellors and leaders combine communicative and regulative aspects of working.  
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44 What I want in my office is counsellors who are just about in between. Who have the  
45 ability to enforce a regulatory framework, not with pleasure, but they do it at least, and  
46 who also have human characteristics and can communicate with clients. These are  
47 personal qualities that I look for which give me the opportunity to shape them, as I want.  
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50  
51 Listening to them (...) it's tough to not be in work, it's tough to be sick. It's not that hard to  
52 understand. I never think that you can measure everything. But they're measuring a lot,  
53 which is fine, but I don't think our job is fully measurable.  
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### Contradictory simultaneous work demands on leaders and counsellors

Leaders and counsellors use different rationalities to conceptualise their work situations in NAV (Kociatkiewicz & Kostera, 2018). Leaders have to focus on economic goals, while most of the counsellors want to do their best for the clients no matter the cost. The interviewees describe a shift in NAV from quantity linked to finance and measurement of the total production, to quality and the results of their work with the individual client:

We see a shift towards focusing more on quality. Initially when NAV was established, there was a huge focus on quantity and counts. We now see a shift where we are being challenged on what results we achieve. Yes, finances and the numbers we have been measuring have gone well, and this has enabled us to focus more on quality and the quality of client meetings. Pulling the load together and good leadership are everything. The long speeches are so bureaucratic. I want to work efficiently, properly and smoothly, for our office.

In an ideal situation, leaders and counsellors should take both economic efficiency and client satisfaction into account. At the same time, optimising client satisfaction can affect strictly economic goals. These contradictory demands make the leader's and counsellors' workday a stress field in which the ability to meet one requirement does negatively affect the possibility of fulfilling another requirement (McGivern, et.al, 2015).

There are huge expectations, both in terms of finance and savings, in professional results and in many other areas. So there are ... I would say, expectations ... with a very wide breadth. We are expected to deliver equally on all fronts.

Another work demand referred to in the interviews is the ambition to develop a common NAV culture. The interviewees believe that the long-serving counsellors who experienced a sense of mastery in their former agencies find it challenging to relate to new work demands. "It's one NAV. Not state and municipality. Some of the long-serving counsellors in a department said 'we don't like that' and I then had to ask 'who do you mean by we?'" This quote shows how NAV is developing new cultural patterns and how former organisational identity collides with a new and uniform identity.

It seems strange that although it's years since the office was established, the long-serving counsellors are still obstinate in relation to some areas, which is not something we see in

1  
2  
3 the new counsellors. Nor has the management necessarily been instrumental in ensuring  
4 the cultures blend together, because the structures have been fairly separate, and structure  
5 has gone before culture. We try to merge the structures to change the culture.  
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9 The above quote shows the role-making processes between leaders and counsellors and the  
10 exchange relationship between them (Tummers & Knies, 2013). In NAV, counsellors from  
11 the former agencies influence the newly-hired counsellors, in what we call “horizontal  
12 dyads”. In the vertical dyad, the leaders’ attempts to have dialogue with both long-serving and  
13 newly-hired counsellors will differ in quality (Yukl & Gardner, 2020). Functional  
14 relationships are characterised by mechanisms of reciprocity and social exchange, which  
15 become effective through mutual trust and counsellors’ sense of being valued by their leaders  
16 (Tummers & Knies, 2013).  
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28 The symbolic rationality of work ethos and worldview in NAV  
29 Symbolic rationality in NAV presents a coherent description of leaders’ and counsellors’ work  
30 situation (Guiette & Vandenbempt, 2017). Important parts of such a description are the social,  
31 political, moral and ideological circumstances in which NAV operates. Another important  
32 aspect, according to the interviewees, consists of fulfilling its social mission by meeting and  
33 helping the client. It is not just about economic efficiency or reducing dependency on financial  
34 assistance as much as possible:  
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44 I think that the social mission is safeguarded through individual conversations. Every  
45 single client is just as important, so it’s our vision to give people opportunities, and that is  
46 what we do every day through the client conversations. It helps to meet the social  
47 mission. The social mission is met through the meetings with the clients.  
48  
49

50 Another part of the description is financial and concerns the central function of DPM . NAV  
51 needs to clarify how measurements of counsellors’ work with clients should be used and what  
52 role DPM should have in the organisation. The central assumption is that the number of  
53 parameters to be measured should be kept as low as possible, and that the results of the  
54 measurements should be used to investigate what direct effects the efforts have had on the  
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3 client, rather than using them to check the work of individual counsellors (Schaefer & Lynch,  
4  
5 2015):  
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7  
8 It is naturally the social benefit that is important. Whether we have 10 or 50 on a result  
9 sheet is not necessarily so important because it's the quality of the work performed that is  
10 crucial. What Vågeng has said is that there is far too much counting, and that we must  
11 switch to the effects of the measures. Balanced scorecards are fine, but we shouldn't have  
12 to measure have too many indicators.  
13

14  
15 Another element of symbolic rationality in NAV concerns the character of leadership and the  
16 cultures of the three previous authorities on which NAV was "built". The formation of a  
17 coherent NAV culture provides the possibility to create work meaningfulness and higher job  
18 performance (Dulebohn et.al, 2012). The interviewees describe how many former managers  
19 were preoccupied with measurements and goal management and that they almost ignored the  
20 relational aspect of leadership. This is an example of transactional leadership (Burns, 1978;  
21 Yukl & Gardner, 2020). The interviewees ask for more transformational leadership where  
22 they are involved in decision-making, and where dialogue with their leaders underpins the  
23 sense of meaning and mastery in relation to their job (Bass and Avolio, 1990a; Tummers &  
24 Knies, 2013). According to the interviewees, the current leadership strategies in NAV focus  
25 on financial aspects and using DPM to measure work efforts, while also developing the  
26 relational dialogue with the counsellors:  
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45 What leadership is in NAV? That's a difficult question because there are many ways to  
46 talk about leadership. I think there's a link to the three previous cultures that make up  
47 NAV. I don't think at the top level that we have properly become NAV either. I think the  
48 county director has played a role in how leadership is exercised in the different counties,  
49 and I don't know for sure, but different counties have developed differently based on the  
50 type of county director they have, and which previous agency they came from. We had a  
51 leader from the previous social security agency who focused a lot on goals and results,  
52 and very little on other stuff.  
53

54  
55 The symbolic rationality of NAV's activities also encompasses a national cultural element that  
56 does not have to be taken into account in the other Nordic welfare systems. For example, in  
57 Sweden over the past 30 years, the focus and volume of the production of welfare services has  
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2  
3 been centralised under national political control (Lundquist, 1998). Centralisation has led to  
4 the alignment of, for example, the Social Insurance Office and the Employment Service.  
5  
6 Norway has a very strong municipal political mandate, which gives the welfare system a  
7  
8 considerable decision-making mandate and a great scope of action at the local level. This  
9  
10 means that a balance must be struck in the management of NAV between the central state  
11  
12 level and the local municipal level. This is an example of hybrid professionalism of leaders  
13  
14 and organisational logics in mixed structures (Breit, Fossetøl & Alm Andreassen, 2018, p.  
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16  
17 30). This has enabled the various municipalities to focus on parts of “their” NAV:  
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23 The expectations of me as a leader in NAV are a challenge because we have two  
24 management lines, and two different sets of expectations, from my counsellor in the  
25 municipality and my director in the county. This in itself is a suboptimal solution, but  
26 there are differences between my powers of authority on the municipal and state side. I  
27 have more professional influence on the municipal side than on the state side.  
28 Fortunately, this is resolved on some extent on the state side, but there is still a lot of goal  
29 management, while I set my goals myself to a much greater extent on the municipal side.  
30 There are two different budgets and two different bosses. It's a partnership where we meet  
31 annually and talk together, so we find out. It isn't a problem.  
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33  
34 The symbolic rationality of NAV consists of organisational, moral and evaluative aspects,  
35 which can be summed up in the term work ethos. The work ethos consists of the tone, quality  
36 and character of counsellors' and leaders' behaviour in the everyday work of NAV. The tone  
37 expresses the leaders' and counsellors' solidarity with and commitment to the client's situation.  
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39 The quality and character of the NAV work ethos empowers and guides clients through the  
40  
41 system. In NAV, another work ethos consists of the deeper job satisfaction attained by helping  
42  
43 clients achieve a better everyday life (Byrkjeflot, 2008; Lundqvist, 1998).  
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51 I started working to make a difference for people, without necessarily solving every  
52 problem they have. And it's not like I've got time to sit and talk to someone just because  
53 they're sad, that's not what I mean, but it's a matter of actually taking the time to talk to  
54 them.  
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58 The worldview, strongly related to work ethos, shows the reality of NAV's social mandate,  
59  
60 objective and functionality. The social mandate means that Norway deems it important to



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3 finance and run a welfare system for its inhabitants. The objective and functionality includes  
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5 more people in work and activity, fewer receiving financial assistance, a well-functioning  
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7 labour market, good services adapted to the client's requirements and a wholesome and  
8  
9 effective work and welfare management. This is symbolic rationality expressed through a set  
10  
11 of coherent ideas about NAV's activities and their consistency, and the sequence in which  
12  
13 they are performed (Geertz, 1973). In an organisational theory context, NAV is not just a  
14  
15 technically neutral bureaucracy; it includes the counsellors' and leaders' work ethos (Cf.  
16  
17 Kociatkiewicz & Kostera, 2018).  
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## 22 Summary

23 Systems of value-laden symbols in NAV synthesise leaders' and counsellors' ways of  
24  
25 performing their work based on their perception of the fundamental nature of the organisation  
26  
27 (Tummers & Knies, 2013; Yukl & Gardner, 2020). An example is the traditional perception of  
28  
29 NAV as a bureaucratic and strictly production-oriented authority based on economic rationality,  
30  
31 in which both leaders and counsellors behave in a calculated and rule-governed way towards  
32  
33 the client (Brodkin, 2008). This study presents an organisational cultural pattern that challenges  
34  
35 the bureaucratic and economic one (Breit, Fossetøl & Alm Andreassen, 2018). The pattern  
36  
37 concerns both strictly economic matters focusing on numbers, and more relational and  
38  
39 emotional aspects linked to the client (Ellingsen, Eriksson & Røn, 2018). Leaders and  
40  
41 counsellors in NAV use the symbols as resources to communicate their ambitions, define goals,  
42  
43 coordinate work and develop a collective identity. However, cultural symbols often carry  
44  
45 multiple and sometimes conflicting messages (Hatch, 2018). Leaders and employees in NAV  
46  
47 have to combine competencies, practices and values, and, at the same time, focus on both  
48  
49 professional interests and organisational goals (Breit, Fossetøl & Alm Andreassen, 2018;  
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51 Carvalho 2014; Blomgren and Waks 2015). The leader must measure the counsellors' work  
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53 performance and manage the direction and quality of the work (Bovens & Stavros, 2002). At  
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3 the same time, the leader must protect democracy in the workplace through dialogue with the  
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5 counsellor (Edmondson, 2019). The leader should also strive for economic efficiency, meet  
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7 clients' needs, have optimal administration and establish peace to work within and between  
8  
9 different professions working in the business (McGivern, et.al., 2015).

## 12 Conclusion

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16 The aim of this article was to describe work relations between leaders and counsellors in the  
17  
18 Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV). The study focus on communication,  
19  
20 control, work ethos, worldview and Digital Production Management. It presents the concept  
21  
22 of symbolic rationality in an attempt to characterise relations between leaders and counsellors  
23  
24 in NAV. The study tries to answer the following research question: How are relations between  
25  
26 leaders and counsellors in NAV affected by symbolic rationalities in the intersection between  
27  
28 economic, administrative and client-oriented work tasks? The study found (a) that leaders use  
29  
30 DPM to control employees, (b) communicative and regulative aspects of working in NAV, (c)  
31  
32 contradictory simultaneous work demands on leaders and counsellors, and (d) the symbolic  
33  
34 rationality of work in NAV. The aspects (a) to (d) show a specific worldview in NAV.  
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39 The study also found aspects of work ethos in NAV, such as a strong will to help and do well  
40  
41 for the user, and at the same time meet NAV's financial and administrative requirements  
42  
43 (Lundquist, 1998; Byrkjeflot, 2008). It is fruitful to describe this situation using the concept of  
44  
45 symbolic rationality. What, then, is symbolic rationality in the public sector? At a more  
46  
47 abstract level, symbolic rationality is a system of symbols with interacting meanings, which  
48  
49 are historically constructed, socially maintained and individually applied (Goodsell, 1977;  
50  
51 Guiette & Vandenbempt, 2017). At a more tangible level, the study conclude that both leaders  
52  
53 and counsellors face paradoxical demands. The requirements include simultaneously  
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55 achieving economic efficiency, digital administration and control, positive effects for the  
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57 client and professional satisfaction. These demands have a negative effect on each other. If  
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3 one requirement is achieved, it will often have a negative effect on another. This  
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5 organisational logic needs a reciprocal working relationship between leaders and counsellors.  
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7 Reciprocity in this context means that leaders and counsellors need mutual knowledge and  
8  
9 acceptance of each other's responsibilities and duties. The dynamic nominalism of these  
10  
11 simultaneous contradictory demands are at the heart of symbolic rationality in the public  
12  
13 sector.  
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17 Another conclusion is linked to counsellors in NAV, and, by categorising their work  
18  
19 performance as counsellorship, the study indicate aspects that can contribute to reframing the  
20  
21 way counsellors conduct their work. Firstly, counsellorship can be about meeting the client  
22  
23 with respect and recognition. Secondly, it can be about interacting with colleagues and leaders  
24  
25 in the same way. Counsellorship is thus close to leadership, which, in short, means that  
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27 dialogue, recognition and transparency are key values in the reciprocal function of both roles.  
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31 Through symbolic rationality, the study has identified the possibility for further research on  
32  
33 the hybrid professionalism of leadership and counsellorship, at three levels in the  
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35 ambidextrous public sector. The first is the epistemological level, where the concept sets  
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37 limits on how a social situation such as NAV can be spoken about and understood. A second  
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39 level is the theoretical level, where categories and logics can be formed that are seen as being  
40  
41 applicable to work in NAV. The third and final level is the practical level, where the concept  
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43 of symbolic rationality and the meanings connected with it shape leaders' and counsellors'  
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45 professional practice in the public sector. This practice benefits from symbolic rationality to  
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47 manage complexity and ambiguity at work.  
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## Abstract

The aim of this article is to describe work relations between leaders and counsellors in the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV). The study focuses on communication, control, work ethos, worldview and Digital Production Management (DPM). Leaders and employees in NAV have to combine competencies, practices and values, and, at the same time, focus on both professional interests and organisational goals. The study found the following: (a) that leaders use DPM to control employees, (b) communicative and regulative aspects of working in NAV, (c) contradictory simultaneous work demands on leaders and counsellors, and (d) the symbolic rationality of work in NAV. The aspects (a) to (d) show a specific worldview in NAV. The study shows a reciprocity, which means that leaders and counsellors need mutual knowledge and acceptance of each other's responsibilities and duties. It is fruitful to describe this situation in the public sector through the concept of symbolic rationality.

## Key words

Leadership, counsellorship, symbolic rationality, public sector, reciprocal, ambidextrous

## Introduction

Leadership research have focused, during different periods, on leaders' traits, behaviours and the situations in which leadership is exercised. Nowadays, theories of leadership are often hybrids of traits, behaviours and contexts (Yukl & Gardner, 2020). This perspective also involves a hybrid professionalism of leaders, which 'combines professional and organisational logics in mixed structures, mixed forms of coordination (by multiple governance mechanisms), mixed management and mixed professionalism' (Breit, Fossetøl & Alm Andreassen, 2018, p. 30). Yukl and Gardner (2020, p. 26) define leadership as 'the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives'. Working as a leader in the public sector in this context is subject to a number of challenges (Wallo et al., 2013). On the one hand, increasing digitalisation of the public sector with electronic processing gives the leader the opportunity to monitor employees (Power, 1999; Galic, Timan & Koops, 2017). On the other hand, the employee's integrity and rights are important areas, which the leader must safeguard. At the same time, the leader must be the official who fulfils the social tasks of the business based on the Social Services Act, and the facilitator who helps employees guide clients to overcome life's challenges. The leader must also address the conflict that can arise between the employee's work ethos, which means a strong will to help and do the best for the client, and the organisation's financial and administrative requirements, which means complying with the budget and with laws (Lundquist, 1998; Byrkjeflot, 2008).

The category of employee has different meanings, depending on the context in which it is used. Unclear conceptualisation of certain job characteristics, such as job meaningfulness, role-making processes and workload control, affects the reciprocal relations between leaders and employees. Leaders and employees drive one another and develop together in a work



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2  
3 environment characterised by high acceptance of different opinions, which can be creative  
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5 forces when people have autonomy in their work situation (Smith et al., 2008). Good  
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7 collaboration involves both leaders and employees taking personal responsibility for their  
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9 work and the working environment (Arfaeya, 2008). When leaders and employees  
10  
11 collaborate, a smooth and innovative work environment is created where people dare to  
12  
13 experiment and fail. The support of leaders, autonomy, cooperation and the internal climate  
14  
15 are factors that influence an employee's ability to fulfil job demands (Smith et al., 2008).  
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20 The aim of this article is to describe work relations between leaders and counsellors in the  
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22 Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV). We focus on communication, control,  
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24 work ethos, worldview and Digital Production Management (DPM). The article presents the  
25  
26 concept of symbolic rationality, in an attempt to characterise relations between leaders and  
27  
28 counsellors in NAV. In the article, we try to answer the following research question: How are  
29  
30 relations between leaders and counsellors in NAV affected by symbolic rationalities in the  
31  
32 intersection between economic, administrative and client-oriented work tasks?  
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## 36 37 Theory

38  
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40 Transformational leadership and leader-member exchange (LMX)  
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42 Transformational leadership is a values-based style of leadership that distinguishes between  
43  
44 transaction and transformation (Burns, 1978; Yukl & Gardner, 2020). This perspective differs  
45  
46 from a simplified causal and transactional understanding of leadership, where desirable  
47  
48 behaviour is rewarded and undesirable behaviour is punished (Burns, 1978). Transactional  
49  
50 leadership involves an almost ideal mathematical causal understanding of cause and effect in  
51  
52 the leadership context (O'Neill, 1989). Furthermore, transformational leadership emphasises  
53  
54 inspiring employees to do their best by developing a vision, using symbols and setting a good  
55  
56 example (Goodsell, 1977; Yukl & Gardner, 2020). Leaders involve their employees and  
57  
58 follow up with them in a personal manner that underpins their sense of meaning and mastery  
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2  
3 in relation to their job (Bass and Avolio, 1990a; Tummers & Knies, 2013). The use of  
4  
5 transformational leadership today focuses on change and promotes values-based and  
6  
7 relationship-based leadership, which can reverse and possibly prevent leadership failure due  
8  
9 to pure economic leadership rationality (Van Wart, 2003; Kellis & Bing, 2015).

10  
11  
12 Leader-member exchange (LMX) is defined as a leadership practice linked to the  
13  
14 meaningfulness of and commitment to the employees' work situation (Tummers & Knies,  
15  
16 2013). Research show that LMX affects work meaningfulness, which, in turn, influences job  
17  
18 outcomes such as lower turnover, higher job performance, higher job satisfaction and higher  
19  
20 perceived procedural empowerment (Dulebohn et al., 2012). LMX describes the role-making  
21  
22 processes between a leader and individual employees and the exchange relationship between  
23  
24 them (Yukl & Gardner, 2020, p. 276). The theory focuses on 'reciprocal influence processes  
25  
26 within vertical dyads composed of one person who has direct authority over another person'  
27  
28 (Yukl, 2010, p. 235). Different leaders will get along differently with different employees,  
29  
30 and LMX describes the quality of the relationship between a leader and an employee. The  
31  
32 leader may have "favourites" and less favoured members of staff. In low-LMX relationships,  
33  
34 there is mainly an economic exchange between leaders and employees, exemplified by  
35  
36 employees investing their working time in exchange for money. High-LMX relationships are,  
37  
38 on the one hand, characterised by mechanisms of reciprocity and social exchange which  
39  
40 become effective through mutual trust and employees' sense of being valued by their leaders  
41  
42 (Tummers & Knies, 2013). On the other hand, there is concern that there will be less  
43  
44 compliance if the leaders' "favourites" get more benefits than they deserve (Yukl & Gardner,  
45  
46 2020).

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49 Public sector is an ambidextrous organisation with substantial goal complexities and  
50  
51 ambiguities (Zacher & Rosing, 2015; Tummers & Knies, 2013). Accordingly, how leaders  
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53 influence job characteristics, such as job meaningfulness, role-making processes and  
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3 workload control in the intersection between LMX-exchange and organisational commitment  
4  
5 is crucial. Complexity in the public sector requires leaders who balance their administrative  
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7 practices with the adaptive practices needed to respond to dynamic circumstances and  
8  
9 tensions in their leadership (Murphy, Rhodes, Meek & Denyer, 2017). Tensions who raises in  
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11 the intersection between relations, economics, change and the symbols who represents these  
12  
13 tensions (Ellingsen, Eriksson & Røn, 2018).  
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### 16 17 18 Symbolism

19 A symbol can be seen as a part of the interpretive aspects that make up organisational culture  
20  
21 (Hatch, 2018; Guette & Vandenbempt, 2017). This is known as a form of symbolism in  
22  
23 which organisational structures, professional roles and leadership, beyond purely functional  
24  
25 meanings, say something about morals and values. Examples of situations, which are both  
26  
27 practical and symbolic, can be dialogues between leaders and employees, organisational  
28  
29 hierarchies and digitalisation of documentation procedures in the public sector. Symbols in  
30  
31 organisations may also be tools in the decision-making process, in which there are  
32  
33 assumptions, values, goals, creation of meaning and a purpose for symbolic activity that  
34  
35 differs between manipulation and inspiration (Mason, 1994; Yukl & Gardner, 2020). Symbols  
36  
37 are socially formed and the meanings related to them are interpreted through three  
38  
39 mechanisms: externalisation, objectification and internalisation (Hatch, 2018). Externalisation  
40  
41 explains how meanings are carried and communicated through symbols. Objectification  
42  
43 explains how intersubjectively produced understandings appear to be objectively real.  
44  
45 Internalisation explains how one 'accepts the intersubjectively externalized and objectified  
46  
47 understandings of a social group as real' (Hatch, 2018, p. 40). A weakness of the symbolic  
48  
49 perspective is that it does not emphasise the wide array of knowledge processes, and how  
50  
51 individuals can learn implicit relations among objects and store it in their memory (Lord &  
52  
53 Shondrick, 2011).  
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3 Leaders and employees in the public sector have a strong work ethos connected to symbols as  
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5 democracy, social responsibility, rule of law, and equal treatment of the citizens (Lundquist,  
6  
7 1998; Byrkjeflot, 2008). These symbols and the meanings related to them are socialised  
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9  
10 through the social formation of the public sector. This article introduces the concept of  
11  
12 symbolic rationality in the context of organisational analysis in the public sector. The concept  
13  
14 was developed under a research programme on “Leadership and client orientation in the  
15  
16 Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV)”. In the article, symbolic rationality is  
17  
18 not discussed in relation to decision theory in particular, nor does it take a purely  
19  
20 philosophical approach (Cabantous et al., 2010). Instead, we take an approach that involves  
21  
22 endeavouring to understand how a category such as symbolic rationality can be assigned  
23  
24 meanings and how these meanings can be used to describe relations between leaders and  
25  
26 counsellors in NAV (Cf. Hacking, 1999).  
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### 31 Dynamic nominalism as an epistemology of work in the public sector

32 The article’s starting points can be linked to dynamic nominalism that is fruitful to use when,  
33  
34 as a researcher, you have a combined relativistic and problematic approach in trying to  
35  
36 describe and understand work as leaders and counsellors in the public sector. Dynamic  
37  
38 nominalism understands the connection between reality and symbols to talk about it as  
39  
40 relational. The way we talk about a social phenomenon, such as work in the public sector,  
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42 with a specific set of categories (symbols) gives us a limited set of possibilities for action  
43  
44 (Hacking, 1999). Furthermore, dynamic nominalism is a key starting point for those  
45  
46 researchers who use “constructionism” as a framework for comprehension in their studies  
47  
48 (Hacking, 1999). This article does not have a “constructionism” approach, as there are a  
49  
50 number of problematic circumstances in the use of “constructionism” embedded in the  
51  
52 concept itself. One problematic circumstance is covered by the implicit intentionality that the  
53  
54 term “constructionism” indicates. This implies that behind each constructed socio-cultural  
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3 phenomenon, in this case, work in the public sector, there is a specific set of actors, or forces  
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5 that have specific intentions with the design. To understand the socio-cultural phenomenon  
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7 means to identify the different actors and their intentions. Intentionality also holds a  
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9 metaphysical aspect, meaning that actors, powers and intentions are not part of work in public  
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11 sector as a socio-cultural phenomenon, but they are located beyond it. Another problematic  
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13 circumstance with “constructionism” as an analytical concept is that it both confronts and  
14  
15 appeals to a machine metaphor in understanding the public sectors’ internal logic and external  
16  
17 touch points. The understanding of both the public sector and work in it, as machine  
18  
19 mechanics, excludes the possibility of generating knowledge about both in many cases,  
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21 amorphous, inconsistent, illogical and paradoxical character, since strict engineering  
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23 understanding regards these as anomalies. To understand work in the public sector with a  
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25 machine metaphor, as the use of “constructionism” indicates, requires to give it a strong  
26  
27 ontological status, which means that it has a clear temporal starting point, a clear spatial  
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29 location as well as a clear and delimited material body. This also distracts attention from the  
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31 ambidextrous and paradoxical character of work in the public sector, which appears to be  
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33 central aspects in an attempt to create knowledge about the relation between symbolism and  
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35 work (cf. Hacking, 1999).  
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### 43 Conceptual framings of rationality

44 Rational aspects of the NAV organisation can be studied from many different perspectives.

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46 One perspective is theoretical rationality, another is practical rationality, while a third is  
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48 rationality in connection with decisions. From a philosophy of science perspective, a majority  
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50 of scientists have discussed whether, and in what way, rationality has an ontological status as  
51  
52 something that is fundamentally human. Others believe that rationality is shaped and  
53  
54 constructed by different actors in different social situations (Audi, 2004). When rationality is  
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56 discussed in a public welfare organisation such as NAV, it is largely linked to reason and  
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3 what is not random (Weber, 2000). Weber (2000) distinguishes between two ideal types of  
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5 rationality. Goal rationality is when a leader chooses the most expedient means of achieving  
6  
7 the goal. Value rationality, in contrast, is how a certain way of acting has a clear intrinsic  
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9 value that can be justified from an ethical, aesthetic or religious perspective (Weber, 2000).  
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11 Simon distinguishes between subjectively and objectively rational decisions (Simon, 1976).  
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13 Among other things, he discusses whether a leader is subjectively rational when he/she does  
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15 what is believed to be for the best, or whether the leader is objectively rational if the action is  
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17 actually the best option. Our discussion of rationality in this article is directly linked to the use  
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19 of DPM in NAV and to the ambition of establishing metric knowledge, through measuring  
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21 and counting, which can be used to plan and optimise the organisation in a rational manner.  
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23 However, DPM does not only appear to have a measurement function. It is interesting that a  
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25 rational, technical and instrumental tool like DPM can also be used to develop “smoother”  
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27 dialogues between leaders and counsellors in NAV (Ellingsen, Eriksson & Røn, 2018;  
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29 Schaefer & Lynch, 2015). A “smoother” dialogue means that leaders can use administrative  
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31 statistics in their relational interaction with counsellors.  
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39 Traditional leadership research, such as transformational leadership and leader-member  
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41 exchange, have an epistemological starting point, with a rational basis. At the same time,  
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43 today's public sector is paradoxical and inconsistent. Many of the established theories are also  
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45 superior and say little about leadership in practice. There seems to be a research gap here  
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47 between today's leadership practice and the overall established theories. In this article, we try  
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49 to elaborate NAV practices with a new epistemology to which symbolic rationality is central.  
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51 The intention is to bridge the gap between superior theory and practice in NAV.  
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55 **The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV)**

56 NAV consists of the former unemployment agency, social security agency and municipal  
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58 social services in Norway. The municipalities and the state cooperate on finding solutions for  
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3 clients through 456 NAV offices. NAV has around 19,000 employees, out of which around  
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5 14,000 are employed by the state, while around 5,000 are municipal employees. The agency  
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7 manages one-third of the Norwegian state budget through arrangements such as  
8  
9 unemployment benefit, sick pay, pension and financial assistance.  
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## 12 13 Method

14 This article is based on two empirical studies from the same research project at the Norwegian  
15  
16 Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) in the south of Norway called “Leadership and  
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18 client orientation in NAV”. The research design led to the use of semi-structured qualitative  
19  
20 interviews with follow-up questions to collect and analyse the opinions and experiences of the  
21  
22 interviewees (Merriam, 2009). The interview guide covered the following aspects: Cognitive  
23  
24 aspects: The interviewees’ perceptions, understandings, inner logic, and descriptions of the  
25  
26 phenomenon being studied. Emotional aspects: The interviewees’ emotions and attitudes  
27  
28 related to the phenomenon being studied. The interviewees’ actions related to the  
29  
30 phenomenon being studied. The aim of conducting the two empirical studies was to  
31  
32 understand experiences, interactions and processes, whereby qualitative interviewing is  
33  
34 suitable (Crabtree & Miller, 1999).  
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40 A critical comment that can be made about the method is that the interviewees are perceived  
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42 as being very conscientious and loyal to their employer. This may have affected their  
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44 response.  
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## 48 Sample

49 The sample consists of 32 qualitative interviews. The interviewees were recruited through  
50  
51 strategic selection based on two inclusion criteria: 1) being leaders and counsellors in NAV  
52  
53 and 2) in the age range of 26-65 years. In the first study, 16 interviews were conducted with  
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55 leaders; in the second study, 16 interviews were conducted with counsellors. The sample was  
56  
57 recruited from both small and large NAV offices across the county.  
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### Transcription and analysis

The transcriptions of the interviews were in standard written language. The sum of the interviews consisted of 36 hours of audio recordings. In total, the transcribed interviews constitute 162 pages of text. The interviews were read thoroughly after transcription in an attempt to establish a holistic overview of the content (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). The interviews were then reread to find key words and bits of information that were interesting and potentially important to answer the research questions. The tags and bits of information were noted in the margins of the transcribed interviews in a process called coding (Merriam, 2009). These codes were then systematised into groups in a process that Merriam (2009) calls analytical coding. This was an inductive process and the codes that belonged together then formed the main categories in the study, following a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All three researchers were involved in the manual coding, which ensured an unbiased analysis.

### Ethics

All the participants were anonymised and treated confidentially. In connection with the notice regarding the interview, information about the study and a consent form were also sent to the interviewees. The interviewees were informed about what was to happen before each interview. The audio recordings from the interviews were locked in the project manager's office and stored on an external hard drive. The transcribed material was only read by the researchers. The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) approved the project "Leadership and client orientation in NAV" with project number 55412. In accordance with the approval, all audio recordings were deleted at the end of May 2019.



## Results and analysis

Table 1 Main and underlying themes

<b>Main theme 1</b>	<b>Digital production management for control and dialogue</b>
Underlying theme	The symbolic power of digital production management
Underlying theme	Misuse of surveillance creates work overload
Underlying theme	Symbolic rationality of DPM entails surveillance and relations
<b>Main theme 2</b>	<b>Communicative and regulative aspects of working in NAV</b>
Underlying theme	Combination of regulation and communication
Underlying theme	Enforcing rules and doing the best for the client
Underlying theme	Contradicting demands not conflicting
<b>Main theme 3</b>	<b>Contradictory simultaneous work demands</b>
Underlying theme	From administrative measurements to effects on the client
Underlying theme	Exchange role-making processes between leaders and counsellors
Underlying theme	Functional reciprocal relationships based on trust
<b>Main theme 4</b>	<b>The symbolic rationality of work in NAV</b>
Underlying theme	Symbolic rationality of NAV is summed up in the term work ethos
Underlying theme	The worldview shows the reality of NAV's social mandate, objective and functionality
Underlying theme	Symbolic rationality in NAV presents leaders' and counsellors' work situation

### Digital Production Management as a means of leadership control

In addition to DPM's technical and financial function of generating statistics about the work in NAV, it also has a symbolic power that can be used to develop the dialogue between leaders and counsellors in public agencies (Ellingsen, Eriksson & Røn, 2018). Several counsellors assert that DPM is an auxiliary tool, while they also clearly refer to its control aspect (Galic, Timan & Koops, 2017). This may concern the leaders' monitoring of the counsellors in their work situations as well as managing the team. In NAV, the leader can also use meetings to supervise the team in practice, at both the group and individual level. According to the counsellors, this can lead to stress in the work situation if the leader's ability to monitor them leads to an increased workload beyond their normal working hours.

It makes sense, but it does constitute an element of control at the same time. There is a risk of taking on extra work because I only have to do it this week so it doesn't appear in DPM when she comes in and checks.

Yes, but there's not always that much discussion at the meetings; it's more a matter of concluding that last week we only dealt with "six things out of 50". Things are summarised (...). I miss more discussion about how to make the team function internally.

The above quotes show a fairly strong critique of the monitoring aspect relating to DPM. At the same time, the counsellors recognise the need for control and overview of the amount of cases both they and the leader take on. They believe that the leader requires a degree of monitoring in order for the team to function optimally. The critique concerns the fact that surveillance can easily be misused and creates a work overload. This is an example of how a technological tool such as DPM can function as a blueprint for the organisation of how to work in public agencies. DPM can thus be analysed as a cultural force field, or perhaps as a cultural container, in which many different types of factors in a society are addressed and expressed. DPM in NAV is a blueprint which entails aspects of surveillance and control (Power, 1999; Galic, Timan & Koops, 2017). Symbolic rationality related to DPM in NAV

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3 means that leaders and counsellors are simultaneously aware of, and use, both the monitoring  
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5 and relational aspects of the system.  
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#### 8 Communicative and regulative aspects of working in NAV

9 The interviewees describe counsellors who wish to help and do their best for clients, and  
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11 those who are more concerned with enforcing the rules and not as interested in having  
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13 working relationships with the clients (cf. Bjerge & Bjerregaard, 2017). At the same time, and  
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15 according to the interviews, these apparent contradictions are not perceived as conflicting  
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17 extremes because NAV needs a) counsellors who are able to communicate well with clients,  
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19 and b) counsellors who have the ability to enforce a regulatory framework. The ideal  
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21 counsellor is described as having personal qualities that combine both the communicative and  
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23 regulative aspects of working. Although ideally, it would be possible to manage and measure  
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25 production as well as communication and relationships with the clients, several of the  
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27 interviewees expressed that relationships cannot be measured and that it is not meaningful to  
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29 put numbers on the guidance of clients. Several counsellors express a work ethos of wishing  
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31 to make a real life difference for the clients (Byrkjeflot, 2008; Lundqvist, 1998). This is not  
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33 simply a matter of talking to the clients because their life situation is difficult, but also about  
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35 taking time and recognising them as individuals. Symbolic rationality in NAV means that  
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37 both counsellors and leaders combine communicative and regulative aspects of working.  
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44 What I want in my office is counsellors who are just about in between. Who have the  
45 ability to enforce a regulatory framework, not with pleasure, but they do it at least, and  
46 who also have human characteristics and can communicate with clients. These are  
47 personal qualities that I look for which give me the opportunity to shape them, as I want.  
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51 Listening to them (...) it's tough to not be at work; it's tough to be sick. It's not that hard to  
52 understand. I never think that you can measure everything. But they're measuring a lot,  
53 which is fine, but I don't think our job is fully measurable.  
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### Contradictory simultaneous work demands on leaders and counsellors

Leaders and counsellors use different rationalities to conceptualise their work situations in NAV (Kociatkiewicz & Kostera, 2018). Leaders have to focus on economic goals, while most of the counsellors want to do their best for the clients no matter what the cost. The interviewees describe a shift in NAV from quantity linked to finance and measurement of the total production, to quality and the results of their work with the individual client:

We see a shift towards focusing more on quality. Initially, when NAV was established, there was a huge focus on quantity and counts. We now see a shift where we are being challenged on what results we achieve. Yes, finances and the numbers we have been measuring have gone well, and this has enabled us to focus more on quality and the quality of client meetings. Pulling the load together and good leadership are everything. The long speeches are so bureaucratic. I want to work efficiently, properly and smoothly, for our office.

In an ideal situation, leaders and counsellors should take into account both economic efficiency and client satisfaction. At the same time, optimising client satisfaction can affect strictly economic goals. These contradictory demands make the leaders' and counsellors' workday a stress field in which the ability to meet one requirement does negatively affect the possibility of fulfilling another (McGivern et al., 2015).

There are huge expectations, both in terms of finance and savings, in professional results and in many other areas. So, there are ... I would say, expectations ... with a very wide breadth. We are expected to deliver equally on all fronts.

Another work demand referred to in the interviews is the ambition to develop a common NAV culture. The interviewees believe that the long-serving counsellors who experienced a sense of mastery in their former agencies find it challenging to relate to new work demands. 'It's one NAV. Not state and municipality. Some of the long-serving counsellors in a department said "we don't like that" and I then had to ask "who do you mean by we?"' This quote shows how NAV is developing new cultural patterns and how former organisational identity collides with a new and uniform identity.

It seems strange that although it's years since the office was established, the long-serving counsellors are still obstinate in relation to some areas, which is not something we see in

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3 the new counsellors. Nor has the management necessarily been instrumental in ensuring  
4 the cultures blend together, because the structures have been fairly separate, and structure  
5 has gone before culture. We try to merge the structures to change the culture.  
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9 The above quote shows the role-making processes between leaders and counsellors and the  
10 exchange relationship between them (Tummers & Knies, 2013). In NAV, counsellors from  
11 the former agencies influence the newly-hired counsellors, in what we call “horizontal  
12 dyads”. In the vertical dyad, the leaders’ attempts to have dialogue with both long-serving and  
13 newly-hired counsellors will differ in quality (Yukl & Gardner, 2020). Functional  
14 relationships are characterised by mechanisms of reciprocity and social exchange, which  
15 become effective through mutual trust and counsellors’ sense of being valued by their leaders  
16 (Tummers & Knies, 2013).  
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28 The symbolic rationality of work ethos and worldview in NAV  
29 Symbolic rationality in NAV presents a coherent description of leaders’ and counsellors’ work  
30 situation (Guiette & Vandenbempt, 2017). Important parts of such a description are: the social,  
31 political, moral and ideological circumstances in which NAV operates. Another important  
32 aspect, according to the interviewees, consists of fulfilling its social mission by meeting and  
33 helping the client. It is not just about economic efficiency or reducing dependency on financial  
34 assistance as much as possible:  
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44 I think that the social mission is safeguarded through individual conversations. Every  
45 single client is just as important. So, it’s our vision to give people opportunities, and that  
46 is what we do every day through the client conversations. It helps to meet the social  
47 mission. The social mission is met through the meetings with the clients.  
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50 Another part of the description is financial and concerns the central function of DPM. NAV  
51 needs to clarify how measurements of counsellors’ work with clients should be used and what  
52 role DPM should have in the organisation. The central assumption is that the number of  
53 parameters to be measured should be kept to a minimum, and that the results of the  
54 measurements should be used to investigate what direct effects the efforts have had on the  
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3 client, rather than using them to check the work of individual counsellors (Schaefer & Lynch,  
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5 2015):

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7 It is naturally the social benefit that is important. Whether we have 10 or 50 on a result  
8 sheet is not necessarily so important because it's the quality of the work performed that is  
9 crucial. What Vågeng has said is that there is far too much counting, and that we must  
10 switch to the effects of the measures. Balanced scorecards are fine, but we shouldn't have  
11 to measure too many indicators.  
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15 Another element of symbolic rationality in NAV concerns the character of leadership and the  
16 cultures of the three previous authorities on which NAV was "built". The formation of a  
17 coherent NAV culture provides the possibility to create meaningfulness in the work and  
18 greater job performance (Dulebohn et al., 2012). The interviewees describe how many former  
19 managers were preoccupied with measurements and goal management and that they almost  
20 ignored the relational aspect of leadership. This is an example of transactional leadership  
21 (Burns, 1978; Yukl & Gardner, 2020). The interviewees ask for more transformational  
22 leadership, where they are involved in decision-making, and where dialogue with their leaders  
23 underpins the sense of meaning and mastery in relation to their job (Bass and Avolio, 1990a;  
24 Tummers & Knies, 2013). According to the interviewees, the current leadership strategies in  
25 NAV focus on financial aspects and use DPM to measure work efforts, while also developing  
26 the relational dialogue with the counsellors:  
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44 What leadership is in NAV? That's a difficult question because there are many ways to  
45 talk about leadership. I think there's a link to the three previous cultures that make up  
46 NAV. I don't think that at the top level we have properly become NAV either. I think the  
47 county director has played a role in how leadership is exercised in the different counties,  
48 and I don't know for sure, but different counties have developed differently based on the  
49 type of county director they have, and which previous agency they came from. We had a  
50 leader from the previous social security agency who focused a lot on goals and results,  
51 and very little on other stuff.  
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55 The symbolic rationality of NAV's activities also encompasses a national cultural element that  
56 does not have to be taken into account in the other Nordic welfare systems. For example, in  
57 Sweden over the past 30 years, the focus and volume of the production of welfare services  
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3 have been centralised under national political control (Lundquist, 1998). Centralisation has  
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5 led to the alignment of, for example, the Social Insurance Office and the Employment  
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7 Service. Norway has a very strong municipal political mandate, which gives the welfare  
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9 system a considerable decision-making mandate and a great scope of action at the local level.  
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11 This means that a balance must be struck in the management of NAV between the central  
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13 state level and the local municipal level. This is an example of hybrid professionalism of  
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15 leaders and organisational logics in mixed structures (Breit, Fossetøl & Alm Andreassen,  
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17 2018, p. 30). This has enabled the various municipalities to focus on parts of “their” NAV:  
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23 The expectations of me as a leader in NAV are a challenge because we have two  
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25 management lines, and two different sets of expectations, from my counsellor in the  
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27 municipality and my director in the county. This in itself is a suboptimal solution, but  
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29 there are differences between my powers of authority on the municipal and state side. I  
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31 have more professional influence on the municipal side than on the state side.  
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33 Fortunately, this is resolved to some extent on the state side, but there is still a lot of goal  
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35 management, while I set my goals myself to a much greater extent on the municipal side.  
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37 There are two different budgets and two different bosses. It's a partnership where we meet  
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39 annually and talk together, so we find out. It isn't a problem.  
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51 The symbolic rationality of NAV consists of organisational, moral and evaluative aspects,  
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53 which can be summed up in the term work ethos. The work ethos consists of the tone, quality  
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55 and character of the counsellors' and leaders' behaviour in the everyday work of NAV. The  
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57 tone expresses the leaders' and counsellors' solidarity with and commitment to the client's  
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59 situation. The quality and character of the NAV work ethos empower and guide clients through  
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61 the system. In NAV, another work ethos consists of the deeper job satisfaction attained by  
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63 helping clients to achieve a better everyday life (Byrkjeflot, 2008; Lundqvist, 1998).  
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72 I started working to make a difference for people, without necessarily solving every  
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74 problem they have. And it's not like I've got time to sit and talk to someone just because  
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76 they're sad, that's not what I mean, but it's a matter of actually taking the time to talk to  
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78 them.  
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92 The worldview, strongly related to work ethos, shows the reality of NAV's social mandate,  
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94 objective and functionality. The social mandate means that Norway deems it important to  
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3 finance and run a welfare system for its inhabitants. The objective and functionality include  
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5 more people in work and activity, fewer receiving financial assistance, a well-functioning  
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7 labour market, good services adapted to the client's requirements, as well as a wholesome and  
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9 effective work and welfare management. This is symbolic rationality expressed through a set  
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11 of coherent ideas about NAV's activities and their consistency, and the sequence in which  
12  
13 they are performed (Geertz, 1973). In an organisational theory context, NAV is not just a  
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15 technically neutral bureaucracy; rather, it includes the counsellors' and leaders' work ethos  
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17 (cf. Kociatkiewicz & Kostera, 2018).  
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## 22 Summary

23 Systems of value-laden symbols in NAV synthesise leaders' and counsellors' ways of  
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25 performing their work based on their perception of the fundamental nature of the organisation  
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27 (Tummers & Knies, 2013; Yukl & Gardner, 2020). An example is the traditional perception of  
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29 NAV as a bureaucratic and strictly production-oriented authority based on economic rationality,  
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31 in which both leaders and counsellors behave in a calculated and rule-governed way towards  
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33 the client (Brodkin, 2008). This study presents an organisational cultural pattern that challenges  
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35 the bureaucratic and economic one (Breit, Fossetøl & Alm Andreassen, 2018). The pattern  
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37 concerns both strictly economic matters focusing on numbers, and more relational and  
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39 emotional aspects linked to the client (Ellingsen, Eriksson & Røn, 2018). Leaders and  
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41 counsellors in NAV use the symbols as resources to communicate their ambitions, define goals,  
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43 coordinate work and develop a collective identity. However, cultural symbols often carry  
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45 multiple and sometimes conflicting messages (Hatch, 2018). Leaders and employees in NAV  
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47 have to combine competencies, practices and values, and, at the same time, focus on both  
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49 professional interests and organisational goals (Breit, Fossetøl & Alm Andreassen, 2018;  
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51 Carvalho 2014; Blomgren & Waks 2015). The leader must measure the counsellors' work  
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53 performance and manage the direction and quality of the work (Bovens & Stavros, 2002). At  
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3 the same time, the leader must protect democracy in the workplace through dialogue with the  
4 counsellor (Edmondson, 2019). The leader should also strive for economic efficiency, meet  
5 clients' needs, have optimal administration and establish peace to work within and between  
6 different professions working in the business (McGivern et al., 2015).  
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## 10 11 12 Conclusion

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16 The aim of this article was to describe work relations between leaders and counsellors in the  
17 Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV). The study focuses on  
18 communication, control, work ethos, worldview and Digital Production Management. It  
19 presents the concept of symbolic rationality in an attempt to characterise relations between  
20 leaders and counsellors in NAV. The study attempts to answer the following research  
21 question: How are relations between leaders and counsellors in NAV affected by symbolic  
22 rationalities in the intersection between economic, administrative and client-oriented work  
23 tasks? The study found the following: (a) that leaders use DPM to control employees, (b)  
24 communicative and regulative aspects of working in NAV, (c) contradictory simultaneous  
25 work demands on leaders and counsellors, and (d) the symbolic rationality of work in NAV.  
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27 The aspects (a) to (d) show a specific worldview in NAV.  
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42 The study also found aspects of work ethos in NAV, such as a strong will to help and do the  
43 best for the client, and at the same time meet NAV's financial and administrative requirements  
44 (Lundquist, 1998; Byrkjeflot, 2008). It is fruitful to describe this situation using the concept of  
45 symbolic rationality. What, then, is symbolic rationality in the public sector? At a more  
46 abstract level, symbolic rationality is a system of symbols with interacting meanings, which  
47 are historically constructed, socially maintained and individually applied (Goodsell, 1977;  
48 Guiette & Vandenbempt, 2017). At a more tangible level, the study concludes that both  
49 leaders and counsellors face paradoxical demands. The requirements include simultaneously  
50 achieving economic efficiency, digital administration and control, positive effects for the  
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3 client and professional satisfaction. These demands have a negative effect on each other. If  
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5 one requirement is achieved, it will often have a negative effect on another. This  
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7 organisational logic needs a reciprocal working relationship between leaders and counsellors.  
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10 Reciprocity in this context means that leaders and counsellors need mutual knowledge and  
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12 acceptance of each other's responsibilities and duties. The dynamic nominalism of these  
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14 simultaneous contradictory demands is at the heart of symbolic rationality in the public sector.  
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17 Another conclusion is linked to counsellors in NAV, and, by categorising their work  
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19 performance as counsellorship, the study indicates aspects that can contribute to reframe the  
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21 way in which counsellors conduct their work. First, counsellorship can be about meeting the  
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23 client with respect and recognition. Secondly, it can be about interacting with colleagues and  
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25 leaders in the same way. Counsellorship is thus close to leadership, which, in short, means  
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27 that dialogue, recognition and transparency are key values in the reciprocal function of both  
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29 roles.  
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35 Through symbolic rationality, the study has identified the possibility of further research on the  
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37 hybrid professionalism of leadership and counsellorship, at three levels in the ambidextrous  
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39 public sector. The first is the epistemological level, where the concept sets limits on how a  
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41 social situation such as NAV can be spoken about and understood. A second level is the  
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43 theoretical level, where categories and logics can be formed that are seen as being applicable  
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45 to work in NAV. The third and final level is the practical level, where the concept of symbolic  
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47 rationality and the meanings connected with it shape leaders' and counsellors' professional  
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49 practice in the public sector. This practice benefits from symbolic rationality to manage  
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51 complexity and ambiguity at work.  
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