

## TRACING PUBLIC VALUES CHANGE: A HISTORICAL STUDY OF CIVIL SERVICE JOB ADVERTISEMENTS

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**ABSTRACT.** Long term changes in public values are not easily detected. One important reason is the limited availability of reliable empirical data. Job advertisements allow us to go back in history for some decades and job ads may present us with the values that are supposed to guide civil servant behavior. This paper analyses a sample of job ads from 1966 to 2008 in Denmark and the Netherlands. The analysis reveals that Denmark and the Netherlands follow the same pattern: a) merit (expertise/professionalism) is and continues to be the most important selection criteria, but the meaning of merit explodes in several directions; b) job ads develop into platforms for organizational branding with an emphasis on HR-related values although national logos enter the scene (the Danish royal crown, the Dutch national emblem); c) New Public Management values do not crowd out other values, rather value intensity increases.

**Keywords:** public value; value change; professional values; job advertisements; selection criteria; agencification

### **1. Introduction**

The study of public values has gained increasing prominence in public administration research. While most research has concentrated on identifying the actual values (e.g. Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman 2007; Van der Wal 2008; Vrangbæk 2009, Reynaers, 2014, De Graaf & Paanakker, 2014), little is available on value *change* and *continuity*. Although a number of historical

studies exist (Kerkhoff *et al.* 2010), value change has generally been neglected (Beck Jørgensen and Vrangbæk 2011). Studying value changes involves a number of challenges. Besides the complex task of tracing and explaining changes in public values (Beck Jørgensen 2009), the most serious challenge is the lack of data. Apart from normative treatises throughout history on how to behave as a public servant, finding empirical sources is difficult. If we want to go back in time more than just a few years, we must primarily rely on peoples' biased memories and scarce documentary material. Given that values are intangible phenomena and often require context and interpretation to give meaning, the empirical study of value dynamics thus represents a serious challenge.

However, there is a specific source of empirical evidence which has been overlooked thus far in the study of value changes: *public sector job advertisements*. The basic reason for utilizing this type of data is simply that job advertisements allow us to go back in history in a systematic manner, at least for a few decades. For this research, a number of job ads have been randomly selected in Denmark and the Netherlands in the following years: 1966/68, 1976/78, 1986/88, 1996/98, 2006/08. The choice of these two "most similar cases" is inspired by the aim to trace significant, robust developments by limiting the number of possible intervening factors together with practical considerations (as they are the respective home countries of the researchers).<sup>1</sup>

Naturally, a key question becomes why we should expect job ads to shed light on public values. Firstly, hiring people is an important decision, especially in highly labor-intensive organizations such as administrative bodies. As Waldner (2012) notes, job ads are not simply projecting an image of the desirable, but used to actually attract and select people for employment in the public sector. Thus, they can be regarded as prime examples of publicly advertising which values are regarded as important when describing the job, job requirements, and the organization in question. Indirectly, job ads possibly also project an image of the public sector or organization in relation to the rest of society. Thus, we expect job advertisements to reflect not only the values and competences actually needed by the organization but also the normative context of the public organization in question. This implies that the object of study is public values, and not the job advertisement as a Human Resource Management phenomenon.

Another advantage of this type of data is cost-effectiveness, that is, the data are relatively easy to collect, and we expect job ads to be rather concise and brief due to the recruitment context and advertising costs. There are, however, limitations with this source. At the end of this paper, we reflect on the limitations of using job ads as a source for studying values. See also the appendix on data collection.

The starting point for this study is a descriptive interest. Which values are presented in job ads? Do they appear in the whole period? If not, when are they introduced and/or when do they disappear? Next, what type of relations can we find between values, including harmonious or conflicting values (Beck Jørgensen 2006)? How do shifts in values affect these relations and how can we explain such changes (Beck Jørgensen and Vrangbæk 2011)?

First, we want to look for changes in a single central value, professionalism, as this value has long been considered central to public bureaucracy, and there is obvious reason to expect job ads to be direct on this point. We ask whether the balance between well-known selection criteria – merit, patronage, and representative bureaucracy – have changed and whether the interpretation of these criteria has changed.

Second, we are interested in the impact of the “agencification” trend which denoted that large public administration systems have been transformed in the New Public Management era to smaller, semi-autonomous organizations. Is this development indeed reflected in the values presented in job ads? Will we observe a shift in the balance between general system values *versus* organizational and local values?

Third, the public values discourse has formulated the crowding out proposition as follows: NPM values such as efficiency, user orientation, and a business-like approach are claimed to have replaced (crowded out) classic public sector values such as legality and professionalism. We would expect job ads to reflect this. Can this indeed be observed?

## **2. Merit, Patronage, and Representative Bureaucracy**

### ***Questions asked***

As job ads are about hiring, examining selection criteria is inevitable. Peters (2001) differentiates between three basic systems of administrative recruitment: merit, patronage, and representativeness.

In a *merit* system, civil servants are selected on the basis of neutral competence (Peters 2001, p. 87). Expertise or professionalism – referring to skill, knowledge, and experience – is traditionally regarded as one of the most important competences for civil servants and stands central in Weber’s conception of bureaucracy. But competences other than expertise do exist in the traditional version. The modern conception of competence can include a person being selected on the grounds of behavior, such as being cooperative and flexible (Lodge and Hood 2005). Note that merit is considered here to be a general category encompassing several types of competence.

In a system of *patronage*, civil servants are selected on political grounds. Here, the crucial question becomes what is meant by “political”? The tradi-

tional conception of patronage includes two different meanings: party politics (a civil servant appointed because of party loyalty) and nepotism (a civil servant appointed because of personal loyalty). Both versions imply an exchange relationship between a civil servant and a politician. In this form, patronage cannot be applied because the appointment of civil servants on the basis of party politics is of little importance in both the Netherlands and Denmark and because patronage is not likely to be reflected in advertisements. Instead, we apply two dimensions from the public service motivation concept and label them “functional politicization.” These are a) commitment to public interest, understood as obligation- and loyalty-based motivation for providing public services and thereby serving society, and b) attraction to policy making, understood as motivation to participate in and improve the political decisions in order to improve conditions for others or society (Perry 1996; Kim and Vandenabeele 2010).

Finally, the basic idea behind *representative bureaucracy* is that the apparatus should represent the characteristics of the citizens it serves (Peters 2001, p. 89). Which characteristics then become relevant? The traditional answers are 1) physical characteristics such as gender, race, and age and 2) social characteristics such as ethnicity and social-economic background.

What sort of change can we expect within this framework? In general, we expect merit to be the central selection criteria, as several studies have shown this value to be highly important (Beck Jørgensen 2007; Van der Wal 2008; Vrangbæk 2009; Beck Jørgensen and Sørensen 2013). Next, it is fair to expect changes in the interpretation of merit as well as the adoption of a mix of selection criteria, as many studies report more complex governance structures and a more differentiated society (Kooiman 1993; Rhodes 1997).

*Proposition 1: In societies which have since long institutionalized a Weberian bureaucracy in central government such as the Netherlands and Denmark, merit will be the primary selection criterion.*

*Proposition 2: In societies with increasing complexity with regard to problems, knowledge, technologies, and organization, the interpretation of merit will also become more complex.*

*Proposition 3: In societies with increasing complexity with regard to problems, knowledge, technologies, and organization, merit bureaucracy will be supplemented by functional politicization and representative bureaucracy.*

A more specific sub-proposition reads:

*Proposition 3-sub: In societies with an increasing multi-cultural profile, awareness of gender and ethnic and cultural diversity as a relevant value for selection will increase.*

## **Results**

The Danish job advertisements clearly express a very strong “merit bureaucracy flavor.” Merit is present in all of the job advertisements examined from this period (Table 1).

**Table 1** Number of job ads containing references to merit, functional politicization, representative bureaucracy, and NPM values (in %) in the Danish sample

	<b>Merit</b>	<b>Functional politicization</b>	<b>Representative bureaucracy</b>	<b>NPM</b>
1966	100%	3%		
1976	100%			3%
1986	100%			4%
1996	100%	35%		30%
2006	100%	13%	19%	31%

However, the understanding of merit obviously changes. In 1966, merit was understood as technical expertise, as embodied by a university degree (five years of full time academic activity) in law or economics. Slightly less than half of the advertisements call for a degree with distinction.

A typical phrasing of the 66-merit is: “A position is open in the Ministry of Finance (Department of Taxation) for a person with a university degree (with distinction) in law.”

In 1996 and 2006, we find much more nuanced conceptions of merit (see Table 2). Practical experience and language and communication skills are wanted, and personal competences increase sharply. In 2006, personal competences include social intelligence, independence, result orientation, flexibility, sense of humor, robustness, innovativeness, and capacity to cope with stress.

**Table 2** The basic content and style of job ads in the Danish sample

	# of job ads	Description of job and organization	Profile of applicant	Layout	Tone
1966	36	Hardly any	University degree highly important (86%), degree with distinction often wanted (44%)	Very short and very similar ads	Highly formal. No personal pronouns used. The word 'applicant' not used
1976	33	Short description of job in 72%	Specific education (33%), specific qualifications (63%)	Very short and rather similar ads	Mostly formal. No personal pronouns used
1986	25	Rather short job descriptions (52%). Brief introductions to the organization (48%). One ad refers to good working environment	Specific education (64%). General skills, e.g., language (24%), IT (20%), specific qualifications (32%), practical experience (48%), personal competences, e.g., independence (28%), social intelligence (16%)	Mid-sized ads (1/4–1/2 magazine page)	Relatively formal. One ad only uses personal pronouns. Words like 'applicant', 'the hired person' etc. used (48%)
1996	23	Job description in all ads. Introduction to organization in 78%. References to good working environment in 30%. Offering opportunities for personal and	Specific education (43%). General skills like communication (48%), practical experience (43%), language (35%), personal competences like social intelligence (52%), independence (43%),	1/2–2 pages. 48% use one page. Visual effects. Logos (96%), watermarks. Varying typography.	Relatively informal. Personal pronouns used in 43%.

		professional development in 17%. Equal opportunity mentioned in 26%	result-oriented (26%), flexibility (22%), sense of humor (in two ads)		
2006	32	Detailed job description in 85%. Introduction to organization in 78%. Active promotion of job and organization in 44%. References to good working environment in 31%. Offering opportunities for personal and professional development in 34%. Equal opportunities with regard to sex, race and ethnicity mentioned in 69%	Specific education (31%), general skills like practical experience (53%), communication (38%), personal competences like social intelligence (41%), robustness (25%), innovativeness (22%), coping with stress situations (22%), independence (19%), flexibility, result-oriented, sense of humor (each 16%)	1/3–2 pages. 59% use one full page or more. Visual effects. Logos (97%), watermarks, pictures and illustrations. Varying typography	Informal. Personal pronouns used in 87%.

In 2006, the merits demanded (for a position in the Ministry of Justice) could be phrased in the following: “We expect that you have completed a university degree in law or will do so soon. You must be highly professional and able to work in an independent and responsible manner and have the courage to make decisions of great importance. We also expect that you have good verbal and written communication skills.”

In the Dutch case, a very similar pattern can be observed. In 1968, merit is by far the most important criteria mentioned in over 80 per cent of the job ads. Usually, this implies a university degree being required. A characteristic phrase from 1968 from the Ministry of Home Affairs requires: “A completed academic degree, a beta study will be an advantage.”

As in the Danish case, more competences are mentioned over the years. In 1988, for instance, other requirements such as flexibility, efficiency, alertness, effectiveness, being a team-player, possessing management capacities, and/or being result-oriented are added.

Propositions 1 and 2 can thus be confirmed in both the Danish and Dutch cases. Merit is and continues to be an important – if not *the* most important – selection criterion. Merit has also become much more nuanced over time. Essentially, we find much stronger emphasis on informal and personal competences. In sum, the professionalism of civil servants remains a highly important public value in both countries, but the understanding of professionalism has exploded.

Next, we expect that the increasing complexity of society will require merit bureaucracy to be supplemented by functional politicization and representative bureaucracy (Proposition 3). Does this show up in the data?

The Danish job ads indicate that functional politicization did indeed play a role in 1996 and to a lesser degree also in 2006. As noted, a reference to “politics” can have different meanings. In the Danish case, the focus is clearly not on the more altruistic dimensions of public service motivation (commitment to the public interest, compassion, and self-sacrifice). The focus is on an attraction to policy making. Examples are “interest for export and international agricultural problems” and “interest in labor market politics,” indicating an interest in *substance*.

However, most advertisements have a focus on *process*. In five advertisements, the notion of “politics” refers to knowledge about the political-administrative decision making process, including experience in working in a political context, understanding the political restrictions, or simply what politics is about: “...an ability to function and create results in a political environment...;” “...experience in working in a political system...” In seven of the ads, “politics” refers to the active, interested, and even “devoted” participation in the political process – being an actor in the political marketplace. In four of these advertisements, a political flair and/or preference for



influencing policies are requested: "...we are looking for new colleagues with an academic background and an inclination to leave one's mark on Danish research policies...." Indeed, three advertisements are trying to attract potential applicants with jobs offering the opportunity to work with policy making and/or operating in close proximity to the political masters: "...We offer you a motivating job close to the political decision making process."

Even with this relatively limited number of job ads, it is interesting to note that "politics" tends to refer to politics as a handicraft as opposed to policy as substance. What is of interest is not having a political vision but being good at strategizing in a political environment. Finally, it should be added that politics could have referred to the classic neutral and impartial service of the minister, but this aspect is never mentioned.

Also in the Dutch case, no evidence of political inclinations can be identified in the early decades. In 1988, there are two references to "societal responsibility," and the first references to functional politicization are first found in 1998. A flair for politics and the relationship between politics and administration is mentioned thirteen times. In 2008, this is still visible in the required job motivation in terms of wanting to make a contribution to society. In fact, no less than 12.5 per cent of the values observed in 2008 can be regarded as referring to either the public interest dimension or the attraction to the policy making dimension.

Thus, a number of different advertisements include rather dramatic phrases, such as: "If you are working for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, you are working on issues that concern the whole world," "you will be working on socially relevant topics," and "working for central government [*het Rijk*] implies working with concerns that matter to the entire society."

Although we observe rather parallel developments in Denmark and the Netherlands, it should be noted that functional politicization in Denmark mainly assumes the form of interest in public policy making, while a commitment to the public interest is important in the Netherlands. Because of the relatively limited number of observations, these results must be viewed with caution.

Like patronage, representative bureaucracy in its traditional form seems to play the least prominent role. There are no cases specifying that the hiring organization is looking for applicants reflecting the composition of the organization's clientele.

Turning to Proposition 3-sub – the increasing importance of gender, ethnic, and cultural diversity – the conclusion here is that this proposition can by and large be confirmed. In the Danish case, 26 per cent of the 1996 job ads cases include mention of equal opportunities with regard to gender. In 2006, equal opportunities regarding gender shifts to the much broader category of equal opportunities in relation to gender, race, and ethnicity

(and in a few examples also to religion and age), and their occurrence has risen sharply to 69 per cent of the ads (see Table 2). Proposition 3-sub is thus confirmed in the Danish case. One should note that most of the references to equal opportunity indicate that differences in gender, for example, are not allowed to influence hiring. In other cases, equal opportunities are motivated by referring to the positive consequences of diversity among the organization personnel. Of the 2006 ads, equal opportunity is motivated by a need to reflect the social composition of society in only 19 per cent of the ads. And, as mentioned earlier, there are no references to the organization's clientele.

In the Dutch case, the applicant's gender becomes an important issue. In 1978, we find the abbreviations for male or female ("m/v"), being added to job titles and the explicit invitation for men and women alike to consider the vacancy. This remains the case in 1988. Interestingly, the order of the abbreviations shifts from "m/v" to "v/m." In fact, there are numerous instances including statements about how diversity in personnel is strived for and that women are therefore specifically invited to apply, as are ethnic and cultural minorities. In most of the cases, these three groups are referred to as preferred candidates. In 1998, motives are given in the Dutch advertisement as to why women are specifically targeted. Thus, the Department of Justice states: "Justice helps improve employment chances for women," and "in light of the configuration of the work force at this division, women are strongly preferred when equally suitable." Other ministries also explicitly refer to the underrepresentation of women among their personnel (cf. De Best 2009, p. 30).

**Table 3** References to gender in advertisement in Dutch sample  
(based on *De Best*, 2009, pp. 33–8).

Year	Number of vacancies	Gender references	%	Positive action indicated	%
1968	14	0	0	0	0
1978	41	41	100	0	0
1988	23	21	91	11	48
1998	22	17	77	19	86
2008	9	7	78	1	11

In 1998, disabled people – as a new category – are specifically included in seven of the 22 cases studied. References to ethnicity, cultural identity, and disability vanished in 2008; only gender recurs, and it is not mentioned in all of the ads. The data indicate that the interest in the gender issue has risen and fallen over the years (see Table 3). One possible explanation is that either this issue has vanished from the agenda or these values have become

so generally accepted that they no longer merit mention. The fact that where specific mention is still made to gender, it is with the explicit argument that there is a need for “more women at the top” – not in general – would seem to support the latter.

In sum, although Proposition 3 can only be partly confirmed, it should be noted that all of the job advertisements from the late 1990s and early 21st century incorporate competences and values that were unthinkable in the beginning of the period. In particular, the requested competences have exploded in many directions. Even what we have classified as examples of functional politicization should possibly be interpreted as a new merit: the capacity to act in a political environment and to have a public service motivation. Although merit in the classic sense remains highly important, these findings – also supported by Swiss data (Waldner 2012) – are not entirely in line with the classic Weberian, politically neutral civil servant.

### **3. The Agencification Trend**

#### ***Questions asked***

The previous discussion has taken for granted that the public administration is a uniform system. Presumably, it is not. In 1996, Guy Peters and Vincent Wright formulated “six great truths” about public administration and discussed how public administration in practice drifted away from these “truths:”

1. From self-sufficiency to contracting out, privatization, and competition.
2. From direct, hierarchical, top-down control to the empowerment of street-level bureaucrats and clients.
3. From national “one size fits all” services to tailor-made, individualized solutions.
4. From upward accountability to accountability downward to customers.
5. From standardized personnel and budgetary procedures to individual and local solutions.
6. From neutral political service to enthusiastic public managers and the development of organizational value and mission statements.

The essence of these trends is that public administrations in most Western countries are drifting away from a large, uniform public administration system in favor of smaller, semi-autonomous organizations, a trend also labeled as “agencification” (Pollitt *et al.* 2004; Lægreid and Verhoest 2010; Verhoest *et al.* 2012). Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson (2000) identified this transformation as “the construction of organizations” with a) a marked identity and clear boundaries to the environment, b) internal steering capacity, and c) a focus on organizational goals and results. Consequently, the need to legitimize a public organization and present it as an attractive workplace

increases. Following this line of thought, we would expect job ads in the beginning of the period to reflect a uniform, large system and later reflect specific organizational identities and needs. We can thus formulate two propositions:

*Proposition 4: Over time, job advertisements focus less on providing a career in public administration as such and more on a position in a specific organization, and advertisements are increasingly used as platforms for organizational branding and self-exposure.*

As public organizations become identifiable, they tend to see each other as competitors. Thus, they try to profile their jobs and organization as attractive, offering an interesting and attractive way of working and living.

*Proposition 5: Human Relations-related values – including personal development and good working environment – increase in order to attract the best applicants in the labor market.*

## **Results**

There are notable differences on all dimensions regarding agencification in job ads from the early and later periods in both the Danish and Dutch cases. The 1966/68 job advertisements are all drafted in a similar, very minimalist style. They are small and adopt the same layout and setup. They are highly formal (no personal pronouns used), a few of them include a brief description of the job, and none of the job ads from either country include any descriptions of the organization.

The 1996/98 and 2006/08 job ads are much longer, the typography varies considerably, most of the organizations use visual effects, and logos are featured in almost all of the ads. Descriptions of both Dutch and Danish public organizations increase strongly: in the Danish case, from none in 1966 and 1976 to 78 per cent in 2006, and the organizational descriptions are typically in a relaxed “we” and “our” style: “*We* do a lot...;” “*Our* cash management system....”

The Ministry of Finances provides an example of branding: “We are a modern and dynamic workplace with high professional standards. We offer you independent responsibility for challenging and varied tasks, good career opportunities and a flexible and young working environment.”

In both cases, however, there is a counter movement. Although the texts continue to outline specific ministries, bureaus, and agencies, all of the 2008 Dutch advertisements have a similar layout and one logo is used for all of the ministries and agencies. This is due to a broad government attempt to get rid of the pluriformity of logos and styles, the idea being that this will “again” provide government with a more unified identity for the citizens. There is also an interesting catch in the Danish case. It is interesting to

examine the logos featured in the ads more closely and note how 39 per cent of the Danish cases in 1996 feature a variation of a crown and 35 per cent of the cases include the national coat of arms, which in some cases includes a crown. In 2006, 72 per cent of the logos used were variations of the royal crown. This remarkable increase in the use of the crown as a symbol signals adherence to a larger system. So again, the Dutch and Danish cases show similar trends.

To conclude: Proposition 4, on increasing organizational branding and self-exposure, is largely confirmed. There is a clear trend from uniformity and simplicity, hardly referring to the nature of the organization, to elaborate narratives in the early 21st century. The recent enforcing of a more unified style in the Dutch case together with the more voluntary similarities in the Danish case possibly indicate a growing wish to balance the highlighting of organizational aspects with branding government and public administration as *public* as opposed to private. This finding is in line with the notion of a post-NPM era with growing concern for “public” in terms of public values and attention to Public Service Motivation (Steen & Rutgers, 2011).

Proposition 5 concerned an expected rise in Human Relations-related values, such as personal development and a good working environment. The general impression is that the 1996/98 and 2006/8 job advertisements are relatively “soft” in tone compared to the brief statements in the 1966/68 and 1976/78 descriptions. The tone is comparatively informal in the latter part of the period. In the Danish case, no personal pronouns were used in 1966 and 1976, a single 1986 ad used personal pronouns, whereas 43% of the 1996 advertisements and 87% of the 2006 ads featured personal pronouns. As in Denmark, the reader is also being addressed in an increasingly informal tone in the Dutch examples, especially after 1998.

The language is often inviting and constructed as a dialogue. Almost half of the Danish ads from 2006 feature the active promotion of both job and organization. The Ministry of Finance continues (from the previously cited advertisement): “If you would like to become part of this environment and you would like to join us in giving the Minister of Finance and the government the best possible advice...your presence might be what we need.” The Agency for Governmental Management simply asks: “Would you like to join us?”

In the later period, advertisements directly highlight a good working environment, opportunities for personal and professional development, and an interesting job (e.g., professional challenges, proximity to political power). The trend concerning requested personal competences also supports this proposition (e.g. being independent, social intelligence, sense of humor).

Similarly, the Dutch ads from 1998 call for applicants with an affinity with the organization’s work, who are enthusiastic, and who hold an interest

in society. In 2008, PSM-related values such as affinity with the job, working for society, and the like result in 12.5 per cent of the values mentioned (Van der Hoeven 2009, p. 32), and seven of the eight ads point out that working for central government involves a contribution to society, such as a 1998 ad for a policy functionary at the Ministry of Agriculture: “working for central government [*het Rijk*] implies working on [i.e. not for] the Netherlands.”

In general, the number of selection criteria continually increased from 1968 to 1998, with a dramatic increase from 1978 to 1988. Consequently, it can be concluded that HRM-related competences do increase over time; that is, there is a kind of quantum leap in the 1980s, after which they seem to have stabilized in the last two decades at a new (high) level.

#### **4. The Crowding-Out Hypothesis**

##### ***Questions asked***

With little doubt, the most popular proposition on modern value change in public administration is the crowding-out proposition introduced by Hood (1991). According to this proposition, old classic values such as legality, honesty, integrity, and robustness are replaced or colonized by New Public Management (NPM) (cf. Lynn 2006, p. 129). In short, the core idea of NPM is running government like a business, including a focus on efficiency, performance, and results as goals and on private managerial techniques as means. It is a winner-takes-all proposition, envisaging that all public organizations are infused in all respects with modern efficiency considerations. This proposition has been central to debates on NPM. During the 1990s, the main question became: How bad is the damage (Rhodes 1987; Smith 1991; Stewart and Walsh 1992; Olsen 1993; Butler 1994; Greenaway 1995; Keating 1995; Frederickson 1997)?

Proposition 6: *NPM values and techniques tend to crowd out classic virtues and practices.*

##### ***Results***

In the Netherlands, no NPM values can be identified in 1968. In 1978, we only find a few references to “efficiency.” In 1988, 28 NPM values (12.8%) can be identified, including flexibility, efficiency, being a team-player, result-oriented, goal-oriented, dynamic, responsive, management capacities, hands-on approach, and being pro-active. Moreover, a “business-like vocabulary” creeps into the advertisements. The Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment thus introduces itself as a “holding with five companies,” pointing out its annual turnover of 15 billion Euro. One of the

job ads is actually posted by a private recruiting company on behalf of a ministry, which offers fairly clear proof of the outsourcing of recruitment itself (cf. Van der Hoeven 2009). Interestingly, the number of NPM values drops again in 2008, in line with the present post-NPM era (see Table 4).

**Table 4.** Number of vacancies advertised, number of values, and number of NPM values identified in the Dutch sample (based on Van der Hoeve 2009 and De Best 2009).

Year	Vacancies	Number of values	Number of NPM values
1968	15	36	0
1978	44	159	1 (0.6%)
1988	27	219	28 (12.8%)
1998	22	319	44 (13.8%)
2008	8	55	6 (11%)

In Denmark, we also find a notable increase from 0 per cent in 1966 to 31 per cent in 2006 in references to NPM terms such as efficiency, productivity, results, cash management, contract steering, contracting out, business-like approach, and bottom-line (see Table 1).

In that way, job ads give a sense of NPM as a successful intruder in the public sphere. The mention of a number of new skills and personal competences such as result-orientation, flexibility, and innovativeness arguably point in the same direction.

However, this conclusion is somewhat debatable. First, we may ask whether NPM values are core values or merely façade values, that is, espoused values not taken seriously. For example, NPM jargon is often found in the background description of the organization rather than in the descriptions of central goals and missions and/or requested qualifications. In a few instances, NPM does not appear to be taken particularly seriously. In one ad, the Danish Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs states that they subscribe to “casual effectiveness.”

Second, it can be argued that efficiency is not necessarily only an NPM value – efficiency is also a core value in Weberian bureaucracy relating to legal-rational efficiency (cf. Rutgers and Van der Meer 2010), and it has been central to Danish and Dutch administrative reforms for centuries. Furthermore, a study of the codes of good governance from 13 different countries reveals that although efficiency is obviously a core value, it is systematically linked to a discourse on anti-corruption and not understood in the context of managerial economics. Note also that the personal competences and skills we may relate to an HR context, such as independence, flexibility, social intelligence, and a sense of humor, cannot be exclusively linked to NPM.

Third – and from a methodological point of view much more problematically – very few values are directly mentioned at all in the first two decades. In fact, only professionalism/expertise stands out as an explicit value. Indeed, the so-called classic public values (e.g. general responsibility towards society, impartiality, honesty, political loyalty, integrity) are hardly mentioned in the job ads if at all. The case can be made that NPM values are not mentioned just as other values are not mentioned. Moreover, as soon as we identify NPM values, other non-NPM values are always more numerous. Even if we accept that there has been an increase in NPM values, we cannot argue that NPM values have crowded out other values. Finally, references to the royal crown in the Danish logos and a Dutch unified government logo (with the national emblem) also suggest an attempt at distinguishing public administration from the private sector, which would appear to provide further evidence of the dawning of a post-NPM era.

In sum, it is difficult to either confirm or deny the crowding out proposition.

## 5. Implications for Public Value Change: Discussion and Conclusion

*Merit* has consistently been the prime selection criterion, but it has become more nuanced and detailed over time. Thus, professionalism/expertise as a value remains highly important, but the *interpretation* of this particular value has certainly changed by adding informal and personal competences, possibly downplaying traditional technical/formal expertise.

*Patronage* in the traditional sense proved useless as a category. However, when substituting patronage with “functional politicization,” it became possible to identify other types of political loyalty than patronage. In particular, awareness of how to strategize in a political environment and an orientation towards public service motivation stand out – pretty much in contrast to the classic neutral and impartial service of the minister. *Political loyalty* thus seems to be a more *important and action-oriented* value. Especially in the Dutch case, the presence of commitment to the public interest suggests a *responsibility towards society* as a high-level general value which may be in conflict with loyalty towards politicians.

Like patronage, *representative bureaucracy* in the traditional sense is irrelevant. Job ads are not looking for applicants reflecting the organization’s clientele. In that sense, *organizational responsiveness towards users* is *not an active value*. Values that do seem to be introduced in the investigated period are *equality* (gender, ethnicity), *diversity* (as being considered as good for the organization’s performance), and *social coherence* (as the personnel should reflect the composition of society). In sum, the job ads in the two most recent decades clearly incorporate competences and values



from all of the categories. Note also that all of the categories had to be re-defined, suggesting the decreasing relevance of the original typology.

The *agencification* thesis as captured in Propositions 4 and 5 can be largely confirmed. Over time, the advertisements turn from the minimalistic naming of a vacant function to elaborate visualizations and inviting descriptions of the organization and the related policy arena. An unexpected additional observation is that there seems to be an increasing desire to represent the organization as part of government. The implications for value change are simple: from no values to values at the *organizational* level and to some extent values at the *systemic* level.

Linked to the issue of organizational branding is the question as to whether or not public organizations also try to present themselves as attractive workplaces, that is, the rise of human relations-related values as captured in Proposition 5? Again, there is a clear development in the attention devoted to *personal values* (personal development, good working environment) – from no attention at all to considerable attention. Referring to the informal, relaxed, and inviting style, one may even say that a new type of values is introduced: *feel-good values*.

Finally, we also examined the *crowding out proposition*, that is, the rise of NPM at the cost of traditional public values. The number of NPM-related values does increase over time, although we also find a decrease in the Dutch case in the two last decades. However, confirming or denying Proposition 6 is tricky. In a sense, it has been falsified, since other values increase alongside of NPM. Furthermore, professionalism/expertise has remained important, if not central. The most serious problem for a definitive answer – or the most important observation – is that in any decade, classic public values such as integrity, honesty, and legality are not mentioned in job ads. They undoubtedly existed or are still important, but they remain *tacit* or *taken-for-granted* values.

In sum, we can conclude, firstly, that *value intensity* has increased sharply in job advertisements. Secondly, that professionalism/expertise in the formal/technical sense has been supplemented with informal, personal, “feel-good values” as part of an enhanced conception of merit. Thirdly, a new interpretation of political loyalty has surfaced in the form of an attraction to policy making and a commitment to the public interest.

How do these values relate to one another? To some extent, professionalism has simply expanded with new layers of values and formed a *new cluster of neighboring values*. These new layers may not fit well with technical expertise, however, and they possibly include *competing* elements, such as robustness versus innovativeness. Furthermore, the cluster of values related to professionalism can be in conflict with the new, politically oriented values.

Thus, we expect the *necessity of handling conflicting values* to become more important.

Naturally, there are shortcomings to the empirical research presented here. First, one might well ask whether the changes we have identified are particular to the public sector. Waldner (2012) has analyzed public and private job ads in Switzerland. He concludes that besides a few differences there are clear similarities, for example with regard to job requirements such as education, flexibility, the ability to work under pressure, and an independent working style. Although the data are only from 2008/09, this study suggests that our discussions of merit, branding, and the rise of HR values are not specific to the public sector. However, the analysis of functional politicization and the interest in bringing back “public” and “government” – in text as well as graphic design – suggests changes specific to the public sector.

Second, our data have clear limitations. The lack of open references to some apparently “obvious” values and the need to interpret advertisements carefully warn us against relying excessively on job advertisements alone. Moreover, the customs in advertising change over the years. The early material provides very limited information, and job ads by definition only cover publicly advertised positions, while many vacancies are never advertised. Furthermore, we cannot be sure that value changes in job advertisements reflect changes in the public sector or merely fashion shifts in job advertising. Conversely, there are not many other sources covering this many decades so directly providing insight into value changes, and job advertisements represent a unique and cost-effective opportunity to study value changes.

These remarks suggest that future research strategies could include: a) more countries, including countries outside of northern Europe; b) case studies of public organizations going into more detail on crucial questions, such as who drafts the job advertisements (an HR department or the management?), and whether the ads reflect organizational values; c) the development of formal policies guiding recruitment, especially in relation to changes in the public sector.

## **Appendix. Data Collection**

Public sector job ads have been randomly selected in Denmark and the Netherlands. Generally speaking, the Danish and Dutch people and their respective civil services can be regarded as fairly similar in nature: northern European, EU members, small, and rather similar state structures. Nonetheless, the two countries are different in many respects. Most importantly, the number of people able to speak both languages is very limited, and it is

extremely rare to go and work for a government in another country. We might therefore expect the job ads for these vacancies to be exclusively aimed at the local population; and as such reflecting national values. This implies that if the data collected from these two countries reflect a similar pattern, we may have identified a more general trend than merely a local one.

The project originated in Denmark and, inspired by the first results of this research, a very similar study was later undertaken in the Netherlands. As the idea was to empirically establish trends in public values in use in administrative practice, a most similar case study is arguably a good approach for minimizing intervening factors. The initial coordination was limited, resulting in slight differences in data collection. However, this is not reflected in the outcomes.

Job ads from the last five decades were collected: in Denmark for the years 1966, 1976, 1986, 1996, and 2006 and in the Netherlands 1968, 1978, 1988, 1998, and 2008. The period chosen circumscribes a) the time of constructing and expanding the welfare state, b) the fiscal crisis in the public sector following climbing oil prices, c) the introduction of NPM techniques and modernization of the public sector, and d) reactions to these reforms.

In the Danish case, all of the job ads appearing in 3–4 randomly selected issues in 1966, 1986, 1996, and 2006 of the professional journal published by the Danish Association of Jurists and Economists were collected. This association also organizes university graduates with degrees in political science and public administration, and their journal represents the most comprehensive presentation of the vacancies in these fields. For 1976, the archives do not include job advertisements, and ads have instead been picked from a daily newspaper (*Berlingske Tidende*) the last two weeks every month.

In the Dutch case, the same standard procedure was followed but of course the details differ. The ads were collected from Saturday editions in September each year (traditionally, a more concentrated period for job advertisements, as it is immediately after the summer holidays). The ads were taken from the national newspapers *NRC Handelsblad*<sup>1</sup> and *De Volkskrant*. For 1968, the number of advertisements was so low that two other national newspapers were also included: *Trouw* and *The Telegraaf*. These newspapers are all available in the *Koninklijke Bibliotheek* archives in The Hague.

On average, a little less than 30 advertisements were picked for each year for each country. The data include: 1) job advertisements in state organizations, including police, courts, and justice (thereby excluding job advertisements at the municipal and regional levels), and 2) academic positions of a general administrative character, as we want to focus on public values at a general level (thus excluding values linked to specialist functions).

How then to identify values? Although values occasionally figure explicitly in ad texts, such as enthusiasm, innovativeness, and cooperativeness, others are not mentioned at all. Most importantly, values – in fact often “big” values such as loyalty and integrity – have to be identified indirectly. This also applies to common selection criteria, such as merit, which pops up in the guise of all kinds of educational requirements, previous experience etc. Specific requirements for a vacancy, slogans, mottos, logos, and general statements about the organization were therefore extracted in both the Danish and Dutch cases. In the Danish case, the layout, tone, and language in the advertisements were also extracted.

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