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Reputation Management in Societal Security – A Comparative Study

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Reputation Management in Societal Security – A Comparative Study

Abstract.

Societal security poses fundamental challenges for the doctrines of accountability and transparency in government. At least some of the national security state's effectiveness requires a degree of non-transparency, raising questions about legitimacy. This paper explores in cross-national and cross-sectoral perspective, how organisations seek to manage their reputation by accounting for their activities.. This article contributes in three main ways. First, it highlights how distinct tasks facilitate and constrain certain reputation management strategies. Second, it suggests that these reputational considerations shape the way in which organisations can give account. Third, it considers three domains associated with societal security, namely intelligence, flood defence and food safety in five European countries with different state traditions - the UK, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Norway. By using a “web census”, this article investigates cross-sectoral and cross-national variation in the way organisations seek to account for their activities and manage their reputation. This article finds variation across tasks to be more dominant than national variation.

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Introduction

Societal security encompasses a wide variety of activities, involving public, para-public and private organizations. Whether it is areas of intelligence (espionage), protection from natural hazards, such as flooding, or the integrity of basic infrastructures, such as food supply chains, at the heart of societal security is the ambition to maintain ‘order’. While constitutional arrangements, organizational structures, tasks and standard operating procedures are likely to differ considerably across the different fields that encompass societal security (Christensen et al. 2016), organisations operating in this broad field face a particular challenge: on the one hand, some of their operations require a certain degree of secrecy in order to maintain operational integrity; on the other hand, these organizations require legitimacy in order to undertake their activities, which can be achieved both in an instrumental and symbolic way (Brunsson 1989). This latter aspect has arguably become more prominent in light of the growing demand for ‘transparency’ (Picci 2015).

This article considers how public organizations operating in the different areas of societal security seek to sustain a reputation for transparency in order to gain trust from their environment (Wæraas and Maor 2015). In particular, it focuses the public-facing activities of these organizations, i.e. what these organizations communicate across different types of (social) media. In communicating with their environment, organizations employ a variety of symbols that could be specific and targeted on the one hand (van Riel and Fombrun 2007), and “at-large” and of broad appeal on the other (Røvik 2002). These symbols are likely to connect to other forms of account-giving and holding, regardless of whether this involves political, administrative/judicial or professional forms of accountability (Bovens 2007). Societal security is a new term in the area of public administration. It denotes the increasing merger of activities that used to be organised on strictly separate lines, namely civil protection

activities on the hand, and police and military protection on the other. One of the indicators of this development is the trend towards national risk registers as well as the use of similar organisational 'situation rooms' and other crisis management procedures.

This article contributes in three main ways. First, it considers how reputation management across government agencies is shaped by tasks and context. Second, we suggest that these reputational considerations shape the way in which government agencies give account. This article is about investigating aspects of 'social accountability' (Schillemans 2008). "Social accountability" refers to account-giving to the public at large which include mandatory requirements and voluntary initiatives to give account (see also Koop 2014). Third, we explore these two advances in the 'hard' case of societal security organisations in three domains - intelligence, flood defence and flooding, in five European countries, Denmark, Germany, Norway, Sweden and UK. By using a web-census the empirical focus will be on how societal security-related organizations seek to manage their reputation by giving account of their activities. In doing so, they rely on symbols in order to address both internal and external audiences. This article focuses on the way agencies display such symbols to enhance their reputation, we are therefore not interested in how successful these agencies are in the eyes of the recipients - we also do not take a distinct position as to whether the deployment of distinct symbols represent meaningful engagement or whether they should be regarded as "double talk" and "hypocrisy". Even if there is a diagnosed decoupling between the ways in which organisations talk and how they act (Brunsson 1989), then these symbols have nevertheless certain performative impacts. Any organisation will suffer distress if this decoupling is going to far - either because of internal disputes, or by the growing divide between organisational practice and the externally held expectations of interested audiences (Busuioac and Lodge 2016a, 2016b).

The paper's main research questions are as follows:

- What are the core symbols characterizing the reputation management of agencies in the societal security sector. More precisely, how do more specific symbols relate to different aspects, such as formal affiliation/control, collective/individually oriented goals, authoritative/service-oriented professional roles or legal framework?
- What is the relationship between these symbols and different accountability types?

First, this article considers the challenges of reputation management that public organizations in general face. Second, we offer a theoretically informed framework that links reputation management to the wider accountability literature. Third, we develop this framework with a particular focus on societal security. This is followed by an outline of the method and data used, a description of the main results and a discussion of the main use of reputation management and accountability types in this policy sector in three sub-sectors in five countries.

Reputation management – definition, variety and challenges

Organizational reputation is widely defined as “a set of beliefs about an organization’s capacities, intentions, history, and mission that are embedded in a network of multiple audiences” (Carpenter 2010, 33). Leaders in a public agency attempt to invoke symbols and interpretations to appeal to diverse actors in their environment so as to build a reputation (Wæraas and Maor 2015, 4). These “networks of multiple audiences” include elected representatives, executive political and administrative leaders, interest groups, policy experts, the media and individual subjects. Reputation management involves issues about the core mission of an agency, reflecting on the agency’s historical path, its main resources and competences, and its outputs and outcomes. Success in “the presentation of self in everyday life” (Goffman 1959) does, however, not just depend on the agency’s own presentational

capacities, but also on how these activities are perceived by these ‘networks of multiple audiences’.

A range of literatures have become increasingly interested in reputation. However, these literatures reflect different understandings regarding the rationality of actors and their degree of agency. A social constructivist perspective emphasizes that an agency's reputation reflects the combined result of the interaction between internal organizations behaviour and the social interaction between stakeholder groups. As a result, agencies have limited control over their own reputation (Power 2007). An institutional perspective would suggest that reputation is embedded in a larger macro-cultural context within which organizations operate (Fombrun 2012). Intermediary actors in organizational fields, for example, international organizations, global consulting firms, monitoring and certification organizations, the media, and non-governmental organizations, provide “objective” information (for example, rankings) that influence reputation management (Elsbach and Kramer 1996). This perspective overlaps with a more deterministic view that organizations are, to some extent, “prisoners of the environment”. Maor (2015, 17) suggests that the latter two perspectives “underestimate the abilities of public bodies to act adaptively, strategically, and opportunistically in developing a good reputation as well as maintaining and enhancing the stability of such reputation”. Accordingly, a political science approach to reputation management takes as a point of departure that “government agencies are generally rational and political conscious organizations” (Maor 2015, 5). This may mean either an economic or a more bounded rationality perspective (Rindova and Martins 2012, Simon 1957): “... their political principals, are often ‘reputation satisficers’, as opposed to ‘maximizers’”(Picci (2015, 39)).

Across all literatures, reputation management reflects an understanding of agency behaviour that places autonomy seeking at the heart of the analysis. According to Carpenter and Krause (2012, 26 – and building on Wilson (1989) and a much longer tradition in

executive politics) - agencies are driven by the protection of their “turf” and, therefore, seek to establish a “protective shield” against hostile actors in the environment (Hood 2011 considers various ‘teflon-coating’ strategies more generally). Reputation management-related activities, therefore, have both a “defensive” component in the sense of seeking to proactively and reactively shuffle any blame side-, up- or downwards, but it also includes an “attacking” component in that these activities could be seen as attempts at influencing the content of the public policy, i.e. a strong reputation is a valuable political-administrative asset (Wæraas and Byrkjeflot 2012, 187).

Following Carpenter (2010), an agency’s reputation can be divided into four dimensions: First, the *performative* dimension refers to the perception as to whether an agency is delivering on outputs and outcomes that relate to its core mission. Agency effectiveness and efficiency are notoriously difficult to assess, and become even more problematic when an agency’s outputs and outcomes are difficult to measure: Societal security is not a domain that is characterized by “production”-type agencies (Wilson 1990, 159-63), and we return to this issue below. Second, the *moral* dimension reflects on the external perception as to whether an agency is viewed as ‘compassionate, flexible and honest’ (Carpenter and Krause 2012, 27), and is seen as protecting the interests of its clients, constituencies and members. This dimension has a cultural-institutional flavour to it (cf. Selznick 1957). Third, the *procedural* dimension has a formal instrumental focus and directs attention to whether an agency follows the appropriate procedural and legal requirements in its decision-making. Fourth, the *technical* dimension emphasizes professional capacities, knowledge and competences within an agency that are necessary to deal with complex tasks and environments. This dimension combines both instrumental and, arguably more importantly, professional-cultural aspects.

The extent to which agencies are able to address any one of these four dimensions is contingent on both internal and external “networks of audiences”. Even if agencies are in a position to choose which dimension to emphasize or how to emphasize particular aspects (such as professional competence), these choices will reflect historical traditions, the agency’s core tasks, or concerns about blame and media headlines. Emphasizing solely one aspect of reputation may come at the expense of other organizational priorities (for example, in the context of higher education, an emphasis on “research excellence” leading to a neglect of teaching). In other words, prioritizing some external stakeholders over others and dealing with diversity of interests within an agency will influence priorities and require a balancing of considerations (Brunsson 1989). Reputation management-related activities will, therefore, on the one hand, seek to appeal to diverse audiences at the same time, and, on the other hand, seek to provide for distinct and targeted messages. Some agencies may be able to co-ordinate their messages, but others may be incapable of bridging the diverse reputational demands of their internal units (Røvik 2002).

As noted, the management of reputation in light of competing demands and expectations from inside an organization and by the “networks of multiple audiences” poses a number of challenges. Following Wæraas and Byrkjeflot (2012, 193-200), five problems can be identified in particular. First, the *politics problem* suggests that agencies only have limited discretion as to the kind of “turf” they are able to occupy. Organizational missions and jurisdictions are mostly pre-determined at the higher political-administrative level, leaving agencies a constrained margin of discretion as to what activities to pursue with what kind of level of enthusiasm. In addition, it also means that agencies have to undertake inherently unpopular tasks, whether this is tax collection, prison services, or other “restrictive” activities. Furthermore, whether the “protective shield” lasts when the political heat is high and the media is calling for a sacrificial lamb in the context of scandal and disaster, is highly

questionable. Nevertheless, one of the intriguing questions in the context of reputation management is exactly why some agencies seem to be more able to withstand or deflect political pressure than others.

Second, agencies also face a *consistency problem*. Given diverse objectives, tasks, (professional) cultures, and diverse career structures, agencies are unlikely to be able to develop one consistent message (Fombrun and Riel 2004). The inherently hybrid character of any agency means that reputation management is, ultimately, about the balancing of different interests and considerations. This, in turn, requires flexibility, ambiguity and ‘hypocrisy’, meaning that agencies might talk in one way, but then act in another. Such a path may be attractive to agency leaders faced by the challenges of consistency and legitimacy (Brunsson 1989).

Third, agencies also face a *charisma problem*. Most bureaucratic activities are unlikely to be well-received in an age of bureaucracy-bashing and general dissatisfaction with the state of public services (Picci 2015). In addition, many public activities, especially in societal security, involve “wicked issues” and “impossible jobs”. Such intractable problems are unlikely to generate a universally agreeable and stable solution. Such a context means that any agency will have difficulty in developing their reputation in terms of moral or performative dimensions, as any decision will always attract opposition and criticism.

Fourth, agencies also face a *uniqueness problem*. Even though it is often alleged that the age of New Public Management has created specialized and disaggregated administrative bodies, the provision of public policies, such as societal security, is about co-production. Furthermore, external audiences do not usually bother acquiring a differentiated understanding of the constitutional arrangements and boundaries. This means that similarity rather than difference will be assumed (Ramirez 2006) and blame will not take the precise responsibility allocation into account (Baekkeskov 2016, Broekma 2016, Resodihardjo et al

2016). Finally, the hybrid nature of many agencies’ activities also means that any attempt at emphasizing uniqueness will generate internal conflict as it is seen as prioritizing one organizational objective over another (Wæraas and Byrkjeflot 2012, 198). Put together, any attempt at stressing uniqueness will prove difficult, the inherent overlap in societal security, and in other policy domains, is unavoidable.

Finally, the *excellence problem* suggests that views about performance and excellence are inherently contested. For example, regardless of standing in national and international league tables, any agency that generates losers (a typical feature of redistributive politics) or encounters high profile failure is likely to be faced with criticism. Furthermore, as noted, excellence becomes even more difficult to establish when outputs and outcomes are hard to measure.

Agencies, therefore, would ideally manage their reputation by persuading their audiences of their moral purpose, their procedural appropriateness, their technical expertise, and their successful performance. Unfortunately, in the real world, the moral purposes of agencies are disputed, procedural compliance is criticised as juridification, technical expertise is challenged and performance, at best, debated. This makes the study of reputation management of central interest for students of organizations; it offers insights not just into

Table 1 Reputation and challenge for reputation management

	Performative	Moral	Procedural	Technical-professional
Politics	Political benefits not aligned to agency performance/blame magnet	Inherent value conflicts	Tension between procedural requirements and ‘responsiveness’	Conflict between electoral and professional logics
Consistency	Incompatible objectives	Competing moral standards	Appropriateness of procedures in diverse contexts	Competing views about technical expertise
Charisma	Impossible jobs generate unpopularity	Disputed legitimacy to exercise judgements	Emphasizes co-production and review	Conflicts with understandings of egalitarian professional cultures

Uniqueness	Inherent co-production of public policies	Contested and organizational overlap	Procedural compliance reduces uniqueness	Non-monopoly on technical expertise
Excellence	Competing standards of excellence	Measurability contested/impossible	Procedural compliance not valued/does not guarantee outputs/outcomes	Contestation as to what excellence in professional expertise implies

how organizations seek to manage their reputation, but also how external audiences respond to these efforts. Ultimately, the study of these activities establishes critical insights for the study of legitimacy and bureaucratic authority (Carpenter 2002). Table 1 offers an overview and examples to illustrate the challenges across the different dimensions of reputation, as outlined by Carpenter (2010).

There are obvious overlaps across dimensions; however, some key themes can be distinguished. The performance dimension raises problems in terms of measurability and contestation between different performative standards. The moral dimension raises questions about the wicked issue nature of particular policy challenges, and therefore points to the possibility that moral acceptance will never universally be granted. The procedural dimension highlights the tension between compliance and responsiveness and flexibility. It also points to the often questionable linkages between procedures and intended outputs and outcomes. Finally, the technical dimension points to disagreements as to what constitutes professional excellence.

Social accountability and reputation management

Managing an agency's reputation has direct linkages to questions about accountability, defined as “a relationship between an actor and a forum, in which the actor has an obligation to explain and to justify his or her conduct, the forum can pose questions and pass judgments, and the actor may face consequences” (Bovens 2007, 4-5). At the heart of accountability are

information, debate/interaction and consequence (Reichersdorfer, Christensen and Vrangbæk 2013). The accountability-related literature has generated various kinds of typologies, usually using the “accountable to whom” question as device to generate different types of categories (Bovens 2007, Dubnick and Romzek 1987, Schillemans 2008). Agencies are faced with different accountability demands, whether it is towards political or administrative superiors, professional bodies or in light of (anticipated) judicial review. As part of their reputation management, agencies therefore have to perform balancing acts as to how to give account towards different audiences and their expectations.

This article is concerned with the information part of giving account to the public at large, otherwise defined as “social accountability”. Such account-giving can be on the basis of formal requirements, such as the publication of annual reports, consultation papers and such like, or it can be based on informal understandings or the voluntary provision of information. In order to come to a better understanding as to how agencies seek to exercise social accountability, we utilize Carpenter’s dimensions of reputation and link these to different audiences. Agencies, in seeking to establish their reputation vis-à-vis the wider public (i.e. “social accountability”), will highlight different types of accountabilities. First, social accountability is likely to be directed at the “citizen” herself, namely how the agency is adding to the well-being of individuals. At the same time, we expect them to report on their “political accountability”, namely the ways they fit into the more general “ministerial accountability” chain towards parliamentary committees, ministers and the wider electorate (at least in liberal democracies) (Mulgan 2003). We also expect them to report on their “administrative and managerial accountability” in terms of their performance of managerial duties (Day and Klein 1987): this includes the publication of performance data (Van Dooren, Bouckaert and Halligan 2010), the release of inspection, audit and annual reports, as well as of procedural guidance. We expect agencies to report on their “professional accountability”,

whether it is in terms of their relationships to professional bodies, the existence of codes of conduct, or an emphasis on the professional qualifications (entry controls) that exist to enter a particular agency (Mulgan 2000). Finally, we expect reference to “legal accountability” in the sense of highlighting cases of judicial review and other compliance documents that highlight procedural appropriateness and the legality of administrative actions taken. Table 2 sums up our discussion.

Table 2 Types of reputation and types of accountability

	Performative	Moral	Procedural	Technical-professional
Political	X	x	x	x
Administrative	X			
Managerial	X			
Professional	X	x		X
Judicial		x	X	
Social	X	X		

Linking these different emphases in terms of account-giving to the earlier discussion of dimensions of reputation provides for clear areas of overlap and offers insights into potential variations. Whereas arguably all dimensions of reputation relate to each form of accountability, we expect that there are certain variations in emphasis. The performative dimension is related to most types of accountability, but the focus is on political accountability. At large, social accountability will be about establishing the moral dimension of reputation; however, to do so, any agency will seek to make reference to its other accountability relationships. The procedural dimension of reputation links primarily to

questions regarding legal accountability. Technical expertise related reputation links to professional accountability.

Having highlighted how reputation management is likely to emphasize particular features and how social accountability is directly connected to issues of reputation management, and, in turn, is informed by different aspects of account-giving to different forums, it is now time to turn to our empirical discussion. How do agencies in societal security seek to manage their reputation by giving account of their activities to the world at large?

Linking societal security to reputation management and accountability

As noted, this article is interested in three domains that characterise the wider societal security set of government activities, namely intelligence, flood defence and food safety. The inclusion of these three domains might appear as controversial as, traditionally, issues of civilian protection (flood and food) have been kept separate from the mostly “law and order”-related aspects of security. As noted already, while differences certainly persist, there has been a noticeable merger of these formerly separate fields over the past two decades (as evidenced, for example in the jurisdiction of the US Department of Homeland Security). Societal security related domains can therefore distinguished in terms of the type of tasks that are being performed, and in terms of general structural differences. We characterize societal security according to task specificity, features of the target population and the nature of the actual work (following Pollitt (2011) and Wilson (1989). This is illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3 Task-related characteristics in intelligence, food safety and flood protection

	Intelligence	Food safety	Flood defence
Visibility of output and outcome	Low/Low	High/Medium	High/Medium

Political sensitivity	High	Medium (in non-incident time)	Low (in non-incident time)
Public resource commitment	High	High	High
Private sector presence	Low	High	Low

Source: Christensen and Lodge (2016)

Table 3 suggests that all the three sub-sectors in societal security are characterized by high public resource commitments, while differing on other features. Intelligence is defined by low visibility in terms of output and outcome and scores highly on political sensitivity; food security is characterized by medium political sensitivity during non-incident times and high on private sector presence; while flooding security features low political sensitivity (during ‘normal’ times) and also low private presence.

Concerning structural dimensions, we distinguish between vertical/horizontal specialization and intra-public sector/external specialization between public and private sector, with related coordination (Egeberg 2012). Combining the two dimensions creates four categories that have implications for reputation management: First, the vertical intra-public sector type could range from very centralized to very decentralized organizational solutions of societal security. Overall, intelligence organizations in most countries are the most centralized, food safety often usually combines a central agency with local authority inspections, decentralized laboratories and branches, while flood defence is often based on the regional and local level, with some functions located at the central government level.¹

Second, horizontal specialization among public organizations ranges from the

¹ In our study we focus on agencies at the central level of government working with flood safety, most of them sharing responsibility with regional and local authorities. While this is therefore a necessarily partial study that has to take into consideration different jurisdictional competencies, the study nevertheless should nevertheless highlight the reputational considerations of these organisations more generally.

presence of “stand-alone” agencies to arrangements characterized by overlapping organizations. Typically, the intelligence area is characterized by a variety of military, civilian and mixed organizations; food safety brings together organizations from the fields of agriculture, fisheries, health and consumers; while flood protection combines environmental and economic aspects as well as regional and/or local actors from technical, police and fire services.

Third, vertical specialization and collaboration with private actors indicates that public authorities are supposedly directing the process in terms of contractualized relationships with the private sector, often also involving competitive bidding and other quasi-market arrangements. Food safety is probably the sub-field that relies most on private actor involvement, for example, by a reliance on private laboratories. Some outsourcing is also evident in flood defence. Intelligence may also involve some collaborations with the private sector (such as in the area of cyber-security), but these are rarely reported upon.

Fourth, horizontal specialization and collaboration between public and private points to a broad dispersion of authority across actors without clear lines of hierarchy. Such relationships are not often observed in the area of societal security (at least not in our sample), but some areas, for example para-public flood defence networks, may be said to represent such arrangements.

These broad characteristics establish a number of expectations as to what kind of empirical patterns should be observed when exploring the reputation-related activities in social accountability of agencies in societal security.

First of all, we expect that intelligence will be characterized by a strong emphasis on political accountability, namely that activities are under democratic control, and on legal accountability, namely that activities follow procedural provisions. There will be some emphasis on prevention in terms of performance, but as “success” is difficult to measure, we

expect a limited emphasis on this dimension. We also expect some emphasis on the expertise situated within intelligence bodies. In other words, there will be an assertion of the technical competence and the moral importance of intelligence work in order to promote liberal democratic values and “security”.

Second, food safety is expected to be characterized by a stronger emphasis on performance, for example, by publishing inspection reports/tables. Furthermore, there will be an emphasis on the technical expertise and procedural appropriateness of inspections and licensing decisions. Following the BSE (mad cow) scandal, we also expect a degree of emphasis on openness of decision-making. We expect less emphasis in terms of political, judicial or administrative oversight; the overall emphasis is, we expect, on the protection of the integrity of the food chain and societal safety.

Third, we expect that the area of flood defence is characterized by a strong emphasis on technical expertise as well as some procedural provisions in order to justify particular decisions. There will be an emphasis on “performance” in terms of reports on flooding incidents and forecasting of future demands. However, we expect most of the direction of account-giving to be directed at society at large, providing information about flood maps and protective methods with less emphasis on elements of political, legal or administrative/managerial accountability.

Table 4 Expectations for reputation and accountability in sectors of societal security

	Intelligence	Food safety	Flood defence	Empirical indicators
Performative reputation	Low overall	High on prevention/ protection	High on prevention/ protection	Core symbols used focusing activities – output and outcomes

Moral reputation	High on collective symbols. Medium/low on openness etc.	High on balancing collective and individual symbols. High on openness, etc.	High on collective symbols. Medium/low on openness, etc.	Core symbols used focusing openness, honesty, trust and caring. Collective/individual symbols
Procedural reputation	High overall	High/medium overall	Medium/low overall	Core symbols stating judicial aspects. Symbols of legal framework for activities
Technical/professional reputation	High on professional quality. Medium on professional regulation and advice	High on both	Medium/low on both	Core symbols used focusing independent expertise and professional quality. Symbols of professional regulation and advice
Political-administrative landscape	High on control	Low on vertical control	Low on vertical control	Symbols of vertical control
Accountability emphasis	Emphasis on political/legal accountability to show commitment to liberal democracy	Emphasis on information to population 'at large', some administrative accountability to report on responsibilities and professional accountability to highlight expertise, less on political or legal accountability	Emphasis on information to general population, emphasis on professional administrative accountability, less on political and judicial accountability	

Method

In order to assess the way in which agencies are seeking to manage their reputation, we explore the symbols on the various agencies' websites and suggest that these highlight the key ways in which these agencies seek to portray themselves. This is in the literature variably labeled as mission-statements, branding, self-presentation, and such like (Wæraas and Maor 2015). Of course, websites can change quickly in light of different fashions in web design or

incidents requiring responses. However, they nevertheless highlight key dimensions of agency reputation management activities - they are also arguably the first point of contact that citizens (and individuals from other countries). Websites are part of soft “soft power” of the state. In line with Table 4, we relate the content of websites to six aspects, namely whether the core symbols employed on the website refer to performance/security, to constitutional norms and core values, to legal procedures, to professionalism, and emphasis in terms of type of accountability. In addition, we also focus on the description of the agency’s embeddedness within the political-administrative landscape. Table 5 summarises the coding scheme.

Table 5 Coding scheme

Dimension	Scoring
Performative	Reference to output/outcomes No reference
Moral	Collective symbols Individual symbols Balance collective/individual None
Procedural	Reference to ‘due process’ No reference to ‘due process’
Technical/professional	Reference to professional regulation Reference to advice & guidance Reference to both None
Placing in political-administrative landscape	Control Autonomy Mixed None
Accountability emphasis	Political Administrative and managerial Legal Professional Social (at large)

We started from the main homepage of the organizations studied, during the same month (February 2015) and made one click on the headlines to further look into how they

presented themselves in different areas (mission statements, tasks, legal basis, history, etc.). We followed the web-design principle that any information should be obtainable within three clicks. Using three clicks as a measure follows principles of good web-design that suggest that any site-user will lose interest after three clicks. In other words, if the information cannot be found within three clicks, it might as well not exist. We then performed a qualitative assessment in accordance with the dimensions in table by scoring findings in terms of high, medium and low. A low score was allocated where websites did not contain reputation symbols related to the different dimensions. A medium score was given when the dimension was addressed but in no major detail. A high score was given where dimensions were addressed with considerable content. In those sectors which are occupied by more than one agency (this was especially the case in intelligence), we include all organizations in that domain. The co-author with strength in a particular language undertook the primary assessment, all results were subsequently moderated between the co-authors so as to ensure consistency between the two authors and country findings.

In the following, we utilise this coding scheme in the context of three domains, intelligence services, flood protection and food safety. The choice of countries reflects a degree of variety of state traditions within the North-Western European context. Partly our choice of country is driven by language capability, partly the choice is theoretically informed. After all, Scandinavia is commonly held to score highly in terms of transparency, whereas the UK represents a case of transparency driven by decades of managerialist reform. The German example offers a case of a European continental administration that has arguably been least exposed to demands for transparency. Apart from this variety generation, there are also some important shared similarities: the agencies are all part of EU-frameworks and they are exposed to each other (if only through neighbourhood effects). Nevertheless, it is likely that they will display some difference, based on national particularities, such as constitutional

arrangements, history or particular national incidents.

Table 6 Overview of number of societal security organisations

	UK	Germany	Norway	Sweden	Denmark
Intelligence	5	3	3	3	3
Food	1	3	1	1	1
Flood defence	1	1	1	1	1

Results

Table 7 summaries the findings. In this section we briefly summarise the different countries. *Norway*. First, the profile of the three sectors shows variety in terms of their emphasis on performance and political accountability. The food agency provides most information on output and outcomes. This is followed by flood defence, with intelligence scoring lowest. Nevertheless, the intelligence services engage in public information provision and use social media. The Norwegian Police Security Service, one of three actors in the intelligence sector, stresses that its activities are controlled by the government, while the food safety domain is characterised by an emphasis on autonomy. Table 2 above suggested that the performative dimension of reputation management can be linked to a number of accountability types. This variety of potential audiences is also evidence in the Norwegian case. We find traces of this in the core symbols given – in intelligence we find the general and strong symbols of “protect the independence of the state” and “resilient society”, in food safety elements of managerial and social accountability, and in flood defence elements of professional accountability.

Second, the moral reputation dimension shows a less varied picture among the sectors. Food safety scores by far the highest. The core symbols highlight that the agency is “open, giving, dedicated and trustworthy”, stressing both collective (“protection of the state”) and individual symbols, suggesting that individuals need to be protected, but that they are also

responsible for their own lifestyle choices. Intelligence-related agencies are broadly similar, they score low in terms of openness. They stress collective symbols, but also seek to appeal to individuals in terms of their potential contribution to add to general security. Third, there is limited variation in terms of procedural reputation across the three sectors. They are all

Table 7 Reputation, accountability in three societal security sectors in five countries

	Intelligence	Food safety	Flood defence
Performative reputation	<p><i>Norway</i>: medium – some information on staff, budget and risk</p> <p><i>Sweden</i>: medium – some information on staff, budget and risk</p> <p><i>Denmark</i>: medium – some information on staff, budget and risk</p> <p><i>UK</i>: low - limited information apart from risk profile</p> <p><i>Germany</i>: low - limited information apart from risks/threats</p>	<p><i>Norway</i>: high – information on all aspects of activities</p> <p><i>Sweden</i>: high – information on all aspects of activities</p> <p><i>Denmark</i>: high – information on all aspects of activities</p> <p><i>UK</i>: high - information on products and inspections</p> <p><i>Germany</i>: medium/low - some information about products</p>	<p><i>Norway</i>: high/medium – quite a lot of information on risks and local conditions</p> <p><i>Sweden</i>: medium – some information on risks</p> <p><i>Denmark</i> – medium/low – selected information on risks</p> <p><i>UK</i>: medium - limited information on flood risks</p> <p><i>Germany</i>: limited.</p>

<p>Moral reputation</p>	<p><i>Norway</i>: medium overall – more collective than individual symbols</p> <p><i>Sweden</i>: medium/high – mixed collective and individual symbols</p> <p><i>Denmark</i>: high/medium – more collective than individual symbols</p> <p><i>UK</i>: medium/high - collective and individual symbols</p> <p><i>Germany</i>: medium - collective and individual symbols</p>	<p><i>Norway</i>: high overall – focus on trust, food safety and protective competence</p> <p><i>Sweden</i>: medium/low – more individual than collective symbols</p> <p><i>Denmark</i>: high/medium – more collective than individual</p> <p><i>UK</i>: high - stress on importance of good governance and food safety</p> <p><i>Germany</i>: medium - stress on integrity of food chain</p>	<p><i>Norway</i>: medium/high – high on collective symbols, focusing vulnerability</p> <p><i>Sweden</i>: medium/low – mostly individual symbols, advice for individual choice</p> <p><i>Denmark</i> – medium/low – mostly collective, coordination symbols</p> <p><i>UK</i>: medium - importance of protection and life-style.</p> <p><i>Germany</i>: medium - importance of protection of ecology and individual life-style</p>
<p>Procedural reputation</p>	<p><i>Norway</i>: medium</p> <p><i>Sweden</i>: high/medium – mentioned in core</p> <p><i>Denmark</i> – medium</p> <p><i>UK</i>: medium - reference to legal provisions</p> <p><i>Germany</i>: high - strong emphasis on legality and constitutional basis</p>	<p><i>Norway</i>: medium</p> <p><i>Sweden</i>: medium</p> <p><i>Denmark</i> – medium</p> <p><i>UK</i>: high - stress on ‘good governance’</p> <p><i>Germany</i> – medium - appropriateness of provisions</p>	<p><i>Norway</i>: medium</p> <p><i>Sweden</i>: medium</p> <p><i>Denmark</i> – medium</p> <p><i>UK</i>: medium - not many core symbols</p> <p><i>Germany</i>: medium - stress on coordination function</p>
<p>Technical/professional reputation</p>	<p><i>Norway</i>: medium – mixed regulation and advice</p> <p><i>Sweden</i>: medium – mixed regulation and advice</p> <p><i>Denmark</i>: high – in core symbols. more regulation than advice</p> <p><i>UK</i>: high - stress on expertise in detection</p> <p><i>Germany</i>: medium - stress on norms</p>	<p><i>Norway</i>: high – mixed regulation and advice</p> <p><i>Sweden</i>: high – both in core and mixing regulation and advice</p> <p><i>Denmark</i>: high – in core symbols, balancing regulation and advice</p> <p><i>UK</i>: high - emphasis on expertise</p> <p><i>Germany</i>: high - emphasis on expertise</p>	<p><i>Norway</i>: high – in core, mixed regulation and advice</p> <p><i>Sweden</i>: medium/low – mostly advice</p> <p><i>Denmark</i> – high/medium – in core symbols, mostly advice</p> <p><i>UK</i>: medium - emphasis on protection</p> <p><i>Germany</i>: medium - emphasis on coordination</p>

safety by stressing the combination of professionally-based reputation and advice, while in flood defence independent expertise and advice are being stressed. The intelligence services stress regulation, but also information, advice and guidance. The accountability emphasis also varies among the different sectors, with intelligence narrowly emphasizing political accountability, while the other two sectors display a more varied pattern, namely by mixing social and professional accountability.

Sweden. The observed variation across sectors on the performance dimension follows that observed in Norway. Autonomy features prominently across the Swedish agencies which is reflecting the long tradition of strong autonomy for agencies (Premfors 1998). Concerning moral reputation, there is variety, with intelligence scoring highest on collective symbols, while flood defence emphasizes individual aspects the most. Overall, Sweden is scoring higher on individual moral symbols than Norway. This may reflect a higher level of adoption of NPM-related themes (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). There is a broad similarity across the sectors when it comes to procedural reputation management. In terms of professional reputation management, food safety scores highly when considering the emphasis on advice and control activities; while flood defence scores highly in terms of advice function alone, which shows more of an individual focus than Norway. Sweden has a broader profile with regards to accountability emphasis than Norway, this means that different forms are mixed. Overall, social accountability is most prominent – agencies address the public at large.

Denmark. Across the three sectors, there are hardly any differences in terms of the performance and the “landscape” dimension, which is similar to Sweden. In contrast to Norway, there is, overall, a stronger emphasis on autonomy, again, similar to Sweden. Concerning scores for moral reputation, intelligence and food safety score high to medium, meaning that they stress moral symbols in the core symbols. In doing so, they score higher than agencies in Norway and Sweden. However, they (similar to Norwegian agencies) mostly

focus on collective symbols and put far less weight on individual ones. As in Norway and Sweden, the three sectors show little variation and do not mention procedural reputation symbols among their core symbols. They do, however, stress several of the judicial frameworks that guide their activities. Finally, the overall scores for technical/professional reputation are high for the three sectors, meaning that they play a prominent part among the core symbols, which is a higher score overall than in Norway and Sweden. Concerning their symbols related to accountability emphasis, Denmark has the same mixed profile as Sweden.

UK. The design of the website already suggests differences in accountability structures. Whereas food and intelligence sectors could (still) rely on their own web design, the Environment Agency (flood defence) has been incorporated into the overall central government website design. This means that it has no separate identity to other government agencies. More generally, the pattern in the UK follows those of the Scandinavian countries. In terms of performance, there is largely “customer” advice in the areas of flood defence (flood maps) and food safety, and some broad threat level indications among the intelligence services. The moral reputation dimension varies between the ‘interests of the government’ and ‘protection’ (in the case of intelligence) to the more generic issues such as the protection of individuals from harm (due to flooding or food related disease). The food sector is also characterized by an emphasis on procedural reputation management, reflecting the concern with “good governance” following the BSE scandal in the late 1990s. The intelligence services highlight their basis on legal sources. In terms of placing in the political-administrative landscape, the intelligence services highlight their linkages to the political executive, the environment agency to its respective ministry, whereas the food standards authority seeks to signal its autonomy.

Germany. The ability to freely emphasise certain themes is severely constrained by the existence of federalism. As a result, agencies in food safety and flood protection have to

highlight their co-ordinative function in a wider system of control. This also means that in terms of accountability, their emphasis is on their legal basis and their linkages to federal ministries. The intelligence services stress the importance of their legal basis. Closely connected is a strong emphasis on a commitment to the constitutional order and the protection of individual and collective security. The food area is arguably the one sector with some emphasis on performance as it provides information on particular goods. Each sector stresses technical competence.

Discussion

This article focuses on the ways in which different agencies seek to manage their reputation by projecting a certain image of their work to a wider audience. Some patterns emerge which cannot be explained by reference to constitutional differences alone. Somewhat unsurprisingly, intelligence emerges as sector which stresses in particular the control by elected politicians and the legal basis of their activities. There is also an appeal to collective and individual symbols by stressing the importance of security and maintaining the integrity of the state. The sectors of food safety and flood defence display certain degrees of autonomy, but cross-national variation exists (Elvbakken et al. 2008). Broadly, the variations across sectors operate in similar ways, suggesting that ‘task’ is an important aspect in shaping the ways in which agencies seek to manage their reputation (Pollitt et al. 2004).

Returning to our expectations as formulated in Table 4, our initial expectations are not completely out of line with the observed patterns (Table 8). If anything, our expectation was that we would observe less extensive reputation management on certain dimensions. For example, despite the difficulties in “measuring” outputs and outcomes, intelligence services across all countries seek to enhance their performative reputation. We expected all agencies to highlight their moral dimensions, but to reflect difference in the way they stress individual and collective symbols. Across all sectors, collective symbols are being stressed, while food

Somewhat less prominent is the procedural dimension of reputation management. Arguably, this is the one dimension that is highly prominent during times of blame and crisis as agencies seek to absolve themselves from blame by denying their responsibility or by stressing their appropriate procedural approach (see Hood 2011). It is noticeable that the main theme emerging from our approach is the emphasis on the procedural safeguards that constrain agencies. This plays a particular role in the case of intelligence services. In food, the UK might be particularly prominent as one of the rationales for regulatory reform in food safety was to enhance transparency in regulatory decision-making following the BSE scandal (Rothstein 2004).

Finally, all three sectors point to attempts at highlighting the technical competency of the agencies involved. In sum, therefore, across the four dimensions of reputation dimensions, agencies generally emphasise themes of professional/technical expertise and moral purpose. This finding may have to do with the medium, the website, as it lends itself more to a display of broad messages rather than detailed accounts of procedural appropriateness of performance related debates, especially as the latter are problematic in the light of lacking output/outcome measurements.

These broad patterns and the variations within them relate also to the key theme in terms of overall accountability emphasis. Intelligence services highlight their embeddedness within wider networks of detection and enforcement, whereas food safety and flood defence do mention their place in the political-administrative rank order (and more so than we initially expected). However, when it comes to an emphasis on different accountability relationships, only intelligence stresses the importance of accountability to politics and law, food safety stresses the importance of accounting to the customer (via warnings, inspection reports,

advice), whereas flood defence is broadly similar to food safety but is less “consumer-focused” as its “product” is different. In other words, we find that task does matter, the way agencies are displaying their activities is shaped by their constitutional context, but, ultimately, the activity itself is more important in explaining why agencies display more attention to some dimensions of reputation management than others.

Among the task-related characteristics, it seems to be political sensitivity and, more importantly, the visibility of outputs and outcomes which account for the way in which agencies give account of their activities on their websites. In addition, political sensitivity can play out in different ways – whereas in the case of intelligence services, this relates to a potential lack of trust in secretive activities, in the case of food safety, this relates to contaminated food and other forms of food-borne illnesses, but also a legacy of governance failure in the late 1990s (BSE). Such issues do not arise in flood defence to the same degree, despite episodes of heightened political heat over prolonged flooding or disputes about insurance arrangements (Rothstein et al 2013).

When looking at cross-national variation, some differences emerge. In the context of Scandinavia, there are small differences across the countries. The main difference relates to the intelligence domain and the degree of emphasis in terms of autonomy or control. Norway, in contrast to Sweden and Denmark, stresses “control”. This is counter-intuitive in terms of wider debates where Danish administration is seen as a more closely integrated system than Norway (Arter 2008); however, this pattern may be related to the heightened political salience of this domain in the context of the atrocities committed by Anders Behring Breivik in 2011 (Christensen and Lægreid 2015). German agencies outside intelligence are bound by their coordinative functions. Across all three sectors, there is a balance between control and autonomy from federal ministries. It is, furthermore, noticeable, that German agencies display their legal procedural provisions more prominently than other countries. The variations within

the UK reflect the trend over the past decade or so of ‘returning’ agencies to central departmental control, as displayed in the case of the Environment Agency. Its re-integration in the overall government website structure highlights not just an emphasis on cost-savings in central government, but a wider ambition to destroy organisational distinctiveness. Overall, variations here reflect mostly the legal competence of the different agencies; with the intelligence services in Germany seeking to highlight their legality in particular which is likely to be a response to contemporary concern about their activities in view of right-wing extremism and co-operation with US intelligence agencies. Overall, however, it is difficult to point to any distinct national patterns; the sectoral similarities across countries are more similar than the national similarities across sectors. If there are national distinct elements, such as the Norwegian intelligence domain, or the UK’s food safety and flood defence domains, then these emerge from distinct sectoral logics, most likely in response to severe (national) incidents.

Conclusion

Reputation management is usually associated with moments of crisis or strain. Agency behaviour is studied when things are going wrong, blame is being shuffled around and actors seek to protect their turf (Hood 2011). Our study has taken a different approach - it has argued that reputation management to the world at large can be studied through the study of websites of government agencies. These websites might be temporary phenomena, but they nevertheless reflect the key interests and emphases that shape organisational attention. This article therefore has added to the literature about reputation management by agencies in a number of ways (see also Busuioc 2015, Gilad 2015, Busuioc and Lodge 2015, 2016).

First, it has taken further the interest in reputation management in government by focusing on a different area, namely websites. By enquiring into the symbols they place on their website, we are interested in the ways they exercise social accountability. We therefore

did not search for particular documents or statements, but were guided by the websites. We have also noted how problematic reputation management in government is. Most existing studies explore agencies on their own. This study has taken the domain as a unit and therefore acknowledged that agencies are inter-dependent. Websites are, of course, only one way of assessing reputation management - appearing in front of parliamentary committee, dealing with the (social) media, and other activities also belong to wider reputation management activities. However, we suggest that in the contemporary age, the first contact between citizen and state is via the website, and therefore the agency's presentation on a website offers important insights into the way in which agencies seek to present themselves.

Second, this article has also brought together the literatures in reputation management and accountability, noting potential ways in which particular aspects of reputation management are central in account-giving to some forums rather than others. In this study, the focus has been on social accountability, namely the way in which agencies communicate to the public at large. However, this form of account-giving can also include evidence of how agencies give account to other audiences (forums). We found this to be particularly the case in the area of intelligence, which is, in itself, not surprising in terms of the task specificity of this domain and the ongoing concerns (and scandals) regarding the secretive work of intelligence services.

Third, this article has advanced a task-related set of expectations as to how agencies manage their reputation. Given certain characteristics (salience, measurability of outputs and outcomes), agencies are able to promote some aspects rather than others. We found that in terms of social account-giving on websites, agencies, across sectors and national jurisdictions, emphasise moral and technical competence. In terms of moral reputation, differences, however, exist between those agencies that point to the collective rather than individual symbols. Here, again, the difference can be explained by the nature of tasks.

Furthermore, the article has also added to the study of societal security. It brings together insights from different sectors and highlights points of commonality. After all, these are sectors in which transparency and accountability represent a “wicked issue” in itself - some aspects of decision-making are supposed to operate ‘in secret’ so as to allow for the effective operation of certain activities (such as ‘counter-terrorism’). How to hold agencies that are supposed to be non-transparent in some of their core activities accountable has been a long-standing debate in public administration, and understanding better how these agencies seek to establish a reputation to appear accountable can therefore add to our understanding about the actual accountability of these agencies that are at the heart of societal security.

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