On the Study of Public Values – Danish Experiences

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Abstract: The notion of public values has been increasingly important in public sector reform and public management in most Western countries for many reasons.[1] Political-administrative scandals have promoted an interest in codes of ethics for civil servants and a revival of judicial values. New management techniques such as value-based management have caused a focus on values. Years of Neo-liberalism and New Public Management oriented reforms have created a need for considering values other than efficiency and more generally a need for re-thinking the normative basis of the public sector (Rhodes, 1987; Smith, 1991; Stewart & Walsh, 1992; Olsen, 1993; Butler, 1994; Greenaway, 1995; Frederickson, 1997; Lundquist, 2001). Further, internationalisation and trans-nationalisation of public organisations, the increasing multi-culturalism in many states and the globalisation of the "good governance" discourse adds to value complexity.

Keywords: public values, public management, ethos

1. Why public values are important

European values – what ever that is – has become important because the enlargement of EU presupposes some homogeneity with regard to not only practices but also public values. Further, EU reallocation of financial resources presupposes low levels of corruption in all EU countries. The corruption issue is also important since high levels of corruption seem to be associated with political instability, poverty and social and economic inequalities (Rothstein, 2003). In this context public values may be extremely important since values such as legality, independent professional standards and public insight – if properly safeguarded by robust institutions - may reduce the level of corruption.

Thus, in a European perspective it is important to implement common and shared public values thereby contributing to a common European administrative space.

So far, it is doubtful whether a European administrative space has been created. Many member states have implemented institutional changes but these cannot be seen as harmonising institutions. Whereas, convergence to some extent can be found with regard to the rule level, there is little evidence on structure and practice convergence (Olsen, 2003).

Several explanations may account for this pattern. First, institutional robustness with regard to the member states can explain why structures and practices do not converge. Second, variations in state institutions may cause similar input from the EU level to be transformed to varying reactions. Third, there might not be formulated a commonly shared administrative ideal attractive to all member states. A fourth explanation might be that it is beside the point to look for a general European administrative space as policy sectors are organised quite differently. Thus, it is crucial to understand state varieties and sectoral varieties, if one is to understand the slow and possibly differentiated development of a European administrative space. One way to look for state and sectoral varieties is to look for variations in the ideals or public values guiding a nation´s (or a sector´s) administrative structures and practices.

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[1] For a longer version of this article the reader is referred to Beck Jørgensen (2006) and Asboe Kristensen & Beck Jørgensen (2008).

These conclusions point to the importance of creating more knowledge of state varieties in Europe. In fact, we know little about values actually held in the public sector in EU countries. Comparative research is highly needed.

In the following sections, the main results from empirical studies in Denmark will be presented, the idea being to give some information of Danish public values and to show how public values can be studied empirically.

2. Methods used in the Danish study

Values are a highly intangible phenomenon and a challenge for the empirical researcher. A simple but costly consequence is that one must be prepared to adopt a number of different empirical methods. The methods adopted in the Danish study were the following:

- A systematic investigation of values mentioned in the *research literature* as important to the public sector in general or public organisations. The purpose was the identification of an overall value universe: what values can we talk about? Only Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian literature in political science, public administration and organisation theory was screened (Beck Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007)
- Identification of the long-term development of values embedded in the *formal rules* guiding the functioning of the public sector in Denmark. Besides the identification of the values that could be sanctioned formally this analysis could be made historic because data can be found in documents. The starting point was mid-nineteenth century. At that time the Danish political system was transformed from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy (Henrichsen, 2003).
- A questionnaire was sent to the top management in all types of public organisations (e.g. regulatory agencies, museums, schools, public transports, libraries, hospitals, courts, core departments in central government, town halls etc.) at all politico-administrative levels (state, counties, and municipalities). The respondents were asked to score given values and to reflect on value changes in the last decade. The idea was to identify values shared by all public organisations and certain value profiles according to level, sector and the like. 1985 respondents answered our questions, which gave a response rate a little less than 60% (Vrangbæk, 2003).
- We collected formal value statements from public organisations. This made it possible to study values as expressed and formulated by public organisations themselves as a contrast to the highly structured questionnaire with given items and response alternatives. The sample consists of 110 value statements, comprising all types of public organisations, from ministries to day care institutions (Riis-Hansen & Simonsen, 2003).
- Case studies were carried out in four typical Danish public organisations with direct contact with users (a library, a church, a hospital and a prison). By using the case method it was made possible to observe behaviour and how organisations organise themselves physically, interview street level bureaucrats and do document analysis (Lindermann & Beck Jørgensen, 2003).
- Case studies were also carried out in five regulating organisations, each being the guardian angel of a specific value (The Ombudsman, The National Audit Office, The Agency of Governmental Management, The Office of Equal Treatment, and The Office of IT-implementation). The idea was to study the interpretation and dynamics of specific values (Palmhøj Nielsen, 2003).
- We did content analysis of public debates on outsourcing in two Danish municipalities and The City of Atlanta, USA. The reason was that outsourcing is a critical event, which tends to make core values much more explicit. We chose one American case to get an idea of cultural variation (Beck Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2002).

3. A general public ethos

One of the questions in the mailed questionnaire focused on the values that were held particularly important for the organisation when carrying out their daily activities in the production core. The respondents were presented a number of values to choose from in a random order. These are listed in table 1 according to their perceived importance. The values were chosen by us to catch various ideals of public administration: hierarchical loyalty, independent professionalism and legality, market like structures, communitarian values like user democracy and citizen involvement, and network management (for further details, see Vrangbæk, 2003).

Importance of values in Danish public organisations. Percentage

Table 1

	All	Departmental level	Agency level
Renewal and innovation	89	88	91
Independent professional standards	87	89	85
Accountability towards society in general	85	84	86
Public insight	80	82	77
Judicial values	80	91	68
Efficiency	74	89	58
Satisfying users´ needs	72	60	85
Political loyalty	71	85	57
Equal opportunity	71	64	78
Continuity	66	56	76
User democracy	62	52	72
Balancing interests	57	63	52
Networking	54	60	49
Career opportunities	54	59	48
Listening to opinion	47	49	44

The table shows the values as evaluated by public top management. Figures are percent of respondents who find a given value to be "basic" or "often very important" to the organisation's core activities. As values can be interpreted in various ways each value was described in order to minimize individual interpretation. Departmental level is understood as centralized administrative units in both central and local government. Agency level comprises "producing" public organisations such as libraries, hospitals, schools, day care institutions, universities, prisons etc. whether being at state, county or municipal level.

We expected somewhat dispersed answers because of sector (health, education, communication, culture etc.), administrative level (state, county, and municipality), status (traditional departmental level vs. agencies) and so forth. Besides this variety we also expected that New Public Management values would be highly important because of many years of neo-liberalistic reform recipes from OECD, The Ministry of Finance, The National Association of Municipalities, consultants and elsewhere.

In short, both expectations were not supported. Although some value variety was present, clear value profiles could not be found. Further, New Public Management values did not emerge as the most important values. On the contrary, the values held in general were at least from a NPM-perspective quite old fashioned. If we pick the results from table 1 with regard to the public sector as such (and for a while omit the most widespread value: renewal and innovation which is not necessarily linked to NPM), the four most important value conceptions are:

- One must work according to independent professional standards
- The public sector should be accountable to society as such
- There must be insight for the public into public organisations
- Judicial values like legality and due process should be guarded

Especially the three first listed values were found across the board. They seem to be important everywhere. But certain nuances could also be detected (Vrangbæk, 2003). From table 1 can be read that at the agency level users´ needs and user democracy are both ranked highly and - provocatively stated - at the possible expense of political loyalty, efficiency and legality, all of which are ranked higher at the departmental level together with networking and the balancing of interests. This leaves us with an impression of the departmental level as populated with "political organisations" and the agency level with "action organisations" (Brunsson, 1989). The same pattern could be found between state, county and municipal levels. Apparently it is a paradox that continuity and equal opportunity are most important at the agency level given that legality is most important at the departmental level. Explanations can be that equal opportunities are linked to the treatment of users and that the relatively high score of continuity reflects that agencies feel subject to too much departmental regulation.

Some variation could be found between sectors but there seemed to be little systematic pattern. All in all, these variations were quite moderate and natural. What was striking was that the four classic values were so widespread against all odds and we will concentrate on these in the following.

Taken together, the four values may form what we will label a general public ethos. This ethos is not formally stated anywhere as *the* public ethos. Nevertheless, it apparently exists in the mind of public managers. It is likely that this ethos has some strength. Not only are the values widespread, to some extent they may even reinforce each other. Legality and due process may be said to be a special case of independent professional standards, public insight may reinforce legality and due process, and the notion of both accountability to society as such and public insight adds a public interest orientation to the overall picture. As a result, serving special interests must be considered illegitimate.

Furthermore, the general public ethos is more important than values such as political accountability, users´ influence and the balancing of interests. This may indicate that the public sector first and foremost orients itself to its own internal values and towards society as such – more than to users, politicians and interest groups. Note also that on the one hand public insight is considered important but on the other hand listening to the public opinion is considered the least important value.

We can find support to this interpretation when looking at answers to other questions in the same questionnaire (figures not shown here). We asked the top managers to consider what factors would motivate their core employees the most. Factors related to work itself had the highest score. The far most important factor of motivation was *professional commitment*. Other factors include *personal development on the job*, a *good working environment*, and *good relations to users*. Factors related to hierarchy/system such as *commitment to organisational mission*, *good relations to superior authorities* and *acknowledgement of budgetary constraints* got medium scores. Lowest score had two Rational Choice favourites: *career opportunities* and a *good payment*. One may argue that respondents to some extent may have chosen socially approved answers. Against this it may be noted that we did not ask the respondents to rank their own factors of motivation but those of the personnel. The conclusion is obvious: public employees are primarily devoted to doing a good job, looking at their job as something like a cause. By and the large, these results confirm earlier findings in an investigation done by the Danish Ministry of Finance (Personalestyrelsen, 2000) and in Rainey & Bozeman, (2000) that summarizes existing research.

We then asked the respondents to consider which qualities of the core personnel they found to be the most important in their organisation. The three most important qualities were *professionalism*, *personal integrity* and a capacity to *cooperate* with others. To our surprise the qualities that had the lowest score were an *understanding of politics* and *flair for economizing*. We could find some variation. An understanding of politics was important in core departments in central government and a flair for economizing was important in public enterprises. But we had to go to the extremes so to speak before these personal qualities were considered important.

In a way one may say that public management perceives the public sector as a societal actor that is expected to serve others but not to please others. In short, we may have identified a classic civil-servant-public-authority-ethos based on type I values. Provocatively formulated and in shorthand:

One is superior to others in order to serve others

Stated in this way it is made clear that the general public ethos implies a subtle balance. If we attach most importance to "in order to serve others" the ethos may give associations to values like public interest, altruism, and dignity. If we however stress, "one is superior to others" we may on the contrary associate to arrogance, pride, and self-complacency.

How can we explain the existence of the ethos? From where do these values emerge? A survey cannot give us answers to this question. We can offer but a few speculations instead. One hypothesis is that these values are dealt with and discussed during the formal training and education of public managers prior to getting a job in the public sector. Probably, this is not a very good answer. The educational background of public managers is very heterogeneous. It includes degrees within law, economy, political science, a high number of specialised degrees, bachelor degrees plus master degrees etc. A more convincing hypothesis would be that these values are part of the informal socialisation in public organisations and that they are reinforced by selection and recruitment of managers.

However, this is merely a mechanism of diffusion and does not explain the original roots of the values in question. Again, we can only point to a few hypotheses, worth of further investigation. First, the broad diffusion of the general ethos makes it likely that the values are part of the general Danish political culture. Therefore we should look for historic explanations. Second, the content or character of values in the general ethos can give us some hints on where in history to look. As suggested in Henrichsen´s (2003) analysis of the formal rules guiding the Danish public sector, legality and due process are the heritage from the Rechtsstaat that was established in Denmark during the eighteenth and nineteenth century and independent professional standards have its roots in the general professionalisation of public services during the twentieth century and earlier. In Denmark public insight is most likely an aspect of the Rechtsstaat also (Knudsen, 2003) but could as well be part of Danish democratic culture. It is tempting to link a commitment to a society as such to both the Rechtsstaat and professionalisation but this explanation is not entirely satisfying since these two traditions are also oriented towards the individual: they inhibit the protection of the citizen and service to the client respectively. Rather one could turn to such diverse sources as the enlightened absolute monarchy and the development of welfare economics. Finally, the devotion of public employees to a cause may have its roots in the notion of vocation in Protestantism.

Still, the ethos may remain an airy construction unless we can trace some effects. If the general ethos do have deep roots in history and is capable of regulating the behaviour of civil servants, we would expect high ethical standards. We have two possible measures on that. First, we should be able to find high levels of confidence and trust in Danish governmental institutions and second a low level of corruption.

In a number of surveys published by the Ministry of Finance in 1998 the public sector is doing quite well (Finansministeriet, 1998). The surveys show 1) that confidence in public institutions are higher than in private institutions, 2) that confidence in public institutions are higher than confidence in unions, the Parliament and the media, and 3) that confidence is especially high in the classic parts of the public sector, i.e. schools, the church, the defence, judicial institutions, and police. In international comparisons Denmark is also doing well. In Gallup's European index from 2002, Denmark is the country with the highest level of confidence in society's institutions (Berlingske Tidende, 2003). This holds true both in general and on a concrete level when asking to confidence in the government, the health sector, and the police. Finally, Denmark is among the top three on the world-ranking list of corruption in government (the abuse of public office for private gain) published by Transparency International (no. 1 in 1998, no. 3 in 2004).

Whether or not public values are linked to, not to say responsible for this state of affairs, cannot be concluded. We need more data and especially cross country studies. On the other hand, recalling the action element in the definition of value, it should be noted that if we found low level of trust and a high level of corruption, we possibly would deny the existence of an ethos.

4. A workplace ethos: "Zeitgeist Light"

Our questionnaire stipulated 15 public values that should be evaluated by the respondents. As an important supplement, we analysed value statements produced by public organisations themselves because these value statements were not restricted to present values stipulated by the researcher. On the contrary, we assumed the value statements to be organisational self-representations and therefore likely to be more authentic expressions of values held in the public sector. Our database consists of 110 value statements collected from all parts of the public sector: day-care institutions, libraries, social service centres, town hall administration, directorates and departments in central government etc. (for further details, see Riis-Hansen & Simonsen, 2003, 2004).

Like in the survey we find astonishing value homogeneity. Though more than 100 value expressions can be found, many of these are clearly synonyms or at least very close to each other. When we have taken this into account about 15 values are prominent and can be found in many statements across sectors and administrative level. Most popular values are *responsibility*, *respect*, *development*, *cooperation*, *quality*, *openness*, *trust*, *commitment* and *professionalism*.

To some extent these values reflect the values in the general public ethos. Openness reflects public insight and professionalism is more or less synonym with independent professional standards. If we add responsibility, commitment and quality we may again see a devotion to a cause or a vocational approach to the job. Thus, the general public ethos is confirmed.

On the other hand this is not an entirely satisfying interpretation. First, judicial values and accountability to society as such are rare guests in value statements. Second, many of the most popular values – respect, openness, trust, cooperation, dialogue – are probably there only to tell us how we should treat other people. In some cases it is made clear that e.g. openness should be understood as openness towards users or politicians. But often it is unspecified and leaves other interpretations open.

Actually, an alternative interpretation is that value statements mostly reflect the values that are supposed to guide people's behaviour in *the working place*. There are good arguments for that interpretation. All the mentioned values fit well into that context. Also, the management *and* the staff have drafted many of the statements through more or less complicated processes, in some cases monitored by external consultants. Finally, we find the same values in value statements from private companies, in textbooks on human resource management and in reform prescriptions from the department in central government responsible for personnel politics in the public sector. The central union for public employees has also drafted a recipe with suggestions for the substance of value statements.

Thus, the best guess is that these value statements reflect a "zeitgeist light", i.e. a fashion: this is – for the time being - the way we should behave and treat each other on the job: be responsible, be open, cooperate with your colleagues, and even be oriented towards your own personal development. Mechanisms of diffusion are probably (as implicitly suggested) consultants, personnel and organisation departments, business schools, unions, meeting places for public managers and the like, i.e. highly institutionalised circles. It fits into this picture that the values are mostly type II-values. They are explicitly justified by referring to their positive *consequences* or *agreement* of a group (e.g. a committee, representatives from all departments or all employed in an organisation). Whether this zeitgeist has deeper roots is an open question.

Beside the mentioned popular values we also find some differentiation. In "soft" organisations like kindergartens, elementary schools, and elderly people's homes values as *understanding*, *creativity*, *concern*, *trust* and *confidence* are more common. By looking at specific words, use of language and pictures we can get traces of more specific professional ethos, e.g. a pedagogical ethos, a social ethos, a Christian ethos and a legal ethos, depending on the organisation in question.

But all in all, it remains a paradox that such diverse organisations turn out to be so conforming when giving the opportunity to express them selves.

5. The professional ethoses

A clear differentiation of public values can be seen only when we investigate concrete organisations on the spot, observe the encounter between staff and users, how it is organised and physically arranged, and talk with the core professionals who are in charge of the direct contact with users: in our cases the librarian, the vicar, the prison guard, and the doctor (for further detail, see Lindermann & Beck Jørgensen, 2003).

The public library had an explicit professional ethos with values like *equality*, *democracy*, *reason* and *enlightenment*. Interviews with the librarians were dense with explicit references to these values and the library in question also demonstrated in policy, behaviour and the placement of walls, furniture, books etc. the importance of service values such as *user integrity* and *openness towards the users*. All in all, the library seemed to be a harmonious organisation. The values in the professional ethos we could observe were not in conflict, and the same values could be detected in interviews, observation of behaviour and artefacts.

Not surprisingly also the church had a strong professional ethos. Part of the ethos was oriented towards the individual with values like *benevolence*, *solicitude*, *confidence*, and *protection*, and part of it was oriented towards a collective with values like *community*, and *solidarity*. The latter part may reflect that the church in contrast to the library has a territory, the parish, and a "herd of users", the congregation. Further, the parochial church council governs the parish. The values are not as harmonious as in the library. Above all, the buildings, the organisation of the interior, the rituals and the priests´ uniform signals *continuity*, *hierarchy*, *social control and integration*, in contrast with values mentioned in the interviews.

One would probably expect a rather strong public ethos in the prison, an expression of the Rechtsstaat, of the belief in law and order, punishment, atonement or rehabilitation. That was not what we found. Nor did we find any strong professional ethos. What we did find was a fairly strong service ethos. This service ethos emphasized that the prisoners had a right to *a decent life* within the institution, as close to the life outside as possible. One could perhaps say that *normality* was the basic value. This value was implemented to the extent that one of the inmates after serving the sentence tried to escape back *into* the prison. The guards had to call the police to bring the former inmate out of prison. Like the church, the values of the prison could not be harmonious. Clearly, all physical arrangements signalled *a-normality*.

The hospital is first and foremost a professional world. Observing the building, the internal signposting, all the physical arrangements, and dress codes of both doctors and patients gives a first hint of being in a world with strong *professional standards* and high *specialization*. Even a doctor, approached at the main entrance, was not able to decode the signposts assumed to guide the visitor to the relevant parts of the hospital! Talking to the doctors and observing encounters with patients, though, left a different impression, an impression of a service ethos, a strong dedication to the patients, i.e. a strong *user orientation*. Like the church and the prison, the hospital clearly showed a split ethos.

6. Relations between the ethoses

Reading the four organisations the way we did obviously reveals variance and idiosyncrasies and does not make the identification of shared characteristics easy. Thus, a natural question is: How do the professional ethoses relate to the general public ethos, if at all?

A straightforward answer is that the four case organisations are variations of the first value presented in the general public ethos: "One must work according to independent professional standards". However, it is not as simple as that. The organisations vary with respect to 1) the affinity between the professional ethos and the general public sector ethos as a whole, 2) the mechanisms and actors who safeguard and develop the values in question and 3) to what extent they perceive themselves as a part of the public sector.

One is tempted to believe that the public library simply subscribes to the general public ethos. No doubt there is a strong affinity between the professional ethos and the general public ethos. Nevertheless, the values in the professional ethos are distinct librarian values. They are taught at the Royal School of Library and Information Science, where all librarians in Denmark get their professional luggage, and we find them in the core values of The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions with reference to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They state the librarian mission, and it is much easier to perceive the library as a part of a strongly homogenized librarian field rather than as an organisation enacting a public ethos – not to say an organisation being part of a specific Danish local government. In a subtle way the librarians indirectly point to the absent significance of political loyalty when they characterize the local government and the politicians as their "colleagues" and state that "the politicians are a natural part of the public sector".

More or less the same reasoning applies to the church. On the one hand, church values are not that far from the general public ethos. At least, the welfare state has reminiscences of church values, if not for other reason, because the vicar earlier in history was the state's first social service employee. On the other hand, the specific church values are taught and developed at the theological faculty and seminary and within the priesthood itself. Further, although the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs administers the Danish church the vicars interviewed did not point to the public sector as a significant actor. Just as the librarians they live with their own values and can do so, because chances for a conflict between the professional and the general public ethos are small.

The prison presents a different case. As noted already in the presentation of the prison values, the maybe naïve expectation was to find traditional judicial values in an organisation so tightly connected with the classic tasks of the state and traditionally organised within the Ministry of Justice. However, the value *normality* can presumably not be labelled as part of the general public ethos. Further we found it difficult to talk about independent professional standards, since the prison guards according to standard definitions of "profession" are not professionals. They have only little formal training and presumably also low status in a sector populated by jurists.

Considering the hospital, the importance of independent professional standards naturally brings it close to the general public ethos, but besides that there is only a minor sense of "public" in the hospital. Professionalism and users-in-contact is what is important. A sense of for example societal responsibility was hard to detect, and hospital management and politicians are seen as enemies.

By and large, the four organisations subscribe to values, which can be seen as variations of "independent professional standards" and in this respect the professional ethoses are linked to the general public ethos. However it is important to stress that the both the librarian ethos, the church ethos, and the hospital ethos seem to exist on their own premises – the two first mentioned most likely in harmony with the general public ethos. The prison represents a special case.

Another approach to the question of relations between the ethoses is to conceive the organisation as constituted of overlapping networks. Relevant examples would be a network consisting of public managers and hierarchical linkages between layers of organisations, a workplace network consisting of those mainly engaged in day-today activities and a network consisting of the core personnel, educational institutions, external professional organisations, expert boards etc. If this holds true, we can see the general public ethos, the workplace ethos and the professional ethoses as located in different networks. The important question is then how these networks interact and develop.

In part in opposition to the network approach it should be emphasized that a few values do seem to have hierarchical priority. Effectiveness and judicial values are more important in central departments than in public organisations producing services directly to the citizens, and they are more important in state organisations than municipal organisations (Vrangbæk, 2003). It should also be noted that effectiveness and judicial values are the only values with fairly strong guardian angels in the top of the entire administrative system (The Ministry of Finance, The National Audit Office and The Ombudsman).

7. Changing public values in Denmark

The picture we have given so far is a snapshot of the public values, as they seem to appear today. However, it is also obvious from the previous analysis that values may change. It should also be recalled (cf. table 1), that public managers in the survey actually ranked *renewal and innovation* as the most important value of all values mentioned, i.e. change is in itself a highly important value. In this section we will present data on how large scale administrative reforms may cause value changes.

When a new administrative reform of the Danish public sector took effect in January the 1st 2007, it marked on of the largest changes of the public sector in Denmark in recent time, including fundamental changes of size, responsibilities and competences of local governments. Almost every municipality has gone through a considerable restructuring process involving readjustment and integration of employees, organizational culture and technology.

The ambitions and objectives with the reform were numerous. The quality of services, the professional approach as well as economic sustainability was to be improved. At the same time the purpose of the reform was to improve the public service for the individual citizen and the functioning of local democracy (The Danish Interior Ministry, 2004b:5) and in general preparing the public sector to manage the increasing expenditures because of the demographic development. In particular, small scale was associated with lack of quality, economic control, large-scale efficiency, and legal administration. All in all, these objectives are not only ambitious; they may also to some extent be contradictory, e.g. the improving of the functioning of local democracy does not necessarily go well with large-scale efficiency.

In order to evaluate value changes, we base the analysis on four different forms of governance: market, network, hierarchy and profession (clan, cf. Ouchi, 1980).[2] It is characteristic that we can envisage several and contradictory hypotheses about the expected changes following the reform, based on reform objectives as well as already existing tendencies in the public sector which might be vitalized by the reform:

- Market governance might be strengthened because it is a central political ambition that freedom of choice, outsourcing and other market-like values and forms of re-organization

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[2] For further presentation of the four forms of governance, cf. Beck Jørgensen (1993).

should be promoted. Further market governance as an element in New Public Management is still an important fashion. Examples are the wish to create greater efficiency and large-scale gains expected following mergers.

- Hierarchical governance might be strengthened because the management in a new and turbulent situation may want to give priority to stabilizing measures. Moreover, clear lines of responsibility and a more firm pursuit of judicial values have been a fundamental objective of the reform.
- The professional form of governance (clan) might be strengthened because professionalism also has been a central political objective. In addition, professionalism as a value is already widespread in public organizations (Vrangbæk, 2003; Beck Jørgensen & Vrangbæk, 2004) and it is likely that tendencies to increase professionalism will be applauded strongly by public employees.
- Network governance might be strengthened because networks in general has become perceived as something very attractive and is already a distinct tendency in the organization of the public sector (Beck Jørgensen & Vrangbæk, 2004).

We further assume the changes and their unpredictability to be greatest in the merged municipalities. According to the historical institutionalism we hypothesize that path-dependency (Pierson, 2000) will have the largest impact on the non-merged municipalities. In contrast, we hypothesize that the merged municipalities are put in a situation characterized by critical junctures (Thelen, 1999) and open policy windows.

The study is based on local top managers' expectations to the future. Late January 2007 we conducted an electronic survey of all local top managers in the 98 municipalities[3]. The survey should identify expectations of local top managers with regard to the reform's impact on the values and forms of governance. Top managers were asked how they expect the reform will affect a) the values in the local administration, b) the influence of actors external to the administration and c) the employees´ factors of motivation and competences. Further, top managers were asked which form of organization and management they will try to create and also which functions they find the most important in their work as local top managers after the reform. Thus, our survey show top managers´ expectations to the consequences of reform as well as their own perception of their role and function after the reform.

In general, top managers expect that the reform will have pronounced effects on a number of values in local government. We will concentrate on the following three values: judicial values, users´ free choice and independent professional standards. We will also pay attention to two weakened values: citizens´ participation and engagement in local politics and satisfying individual users´ needs.

The tabel 2 shows the percentage of local top managers who have answered strengthened or weakened to the question: "*How do you expect the reform will influence the following values in your area of responsibility?* "

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[3] Of 511 top managers 295 responded to the questionnaire which gives a respond rate on 58 pct. In the category merged municipalities N = 202 and in the category non-merged N = 81. It has not been possible to categorize 12 respondents as merged or non-merged This explains why the sum of the two categories not are identical with the total. The distribution of respondents on merged vs. non-merged reflects the actual distribution of municipalities on merged vs. non-merged. Also, there is no bias in the data set with regard to standard variables such as size, geography etc. The survey is presented in more detail in Asboe Kristensen (2007).

How the reform is expected to affect values

	All municipalities		Merged municipalities		Non-merged municipalities	
	Strengt-hened	Weake-ned	Strengt-hened	Weake-ned	Strengt-hened	Weake-ned
Renewal and innovation	78 %	4 %	82 %	3 %	72 %	5 %
Career opportunities	73 %	5 %	77 %	5 %	58 %	5 %
Networking	62 %	5 %	59 %	5 %	69 %	3 %
Efficiency	59 %	6 %	62 %	6 %	51 %	5 %
Judicial values	58 %	3 %	66 %	1 %	41 %	6 %
Users' freedom of choice	57 %	4 %	58 %	3 %	53 %	6 %
Independent professional standards	57 %	4 %	57 %	4 %	45 %	6 %
Flexibility	53 %	10 %	53 %	10 %	54 %	11 %
Political loyalty	52 %	14 %	53 %	12 %	48 %	19 %
Public insight	47 %	6 %	50 %	5 %	35 %	7 %
Continuity	37 %	13 %	41 %	13 %	22 %	16 %
Satisfying individual users´ needs	36 %	21 %	29 %	23 %	53 %	16 %
User democracy	35 %	13 %	34 %	13 %	38 %	15 %
Balancing interests	35 %	8 %	37 %	6 %	26 %	16 %
Listening to public opinion	33 %	5 %	31 %	4 %	35 %	6 %
Citizens participation and engagement in local politics	30 %	28 %	27 %	30 %	35 %	23 %
Accountability towards society in general	29 %	8 %	26 %	8 %	36 %	6 %
Consensus and compromise	17 %	14 %	17 %	14 %	18 %	14 %

Clearly, both judicial values and professional standards are expected to be strengthened to a very high degree. This was also an official objective of the reform. Both values are expected to get more strength in the merged municipalities. A simple reason might be that the process of merging in itself gives an opportunity to questioning standard routines. More likely, however, the difference can be explained by the fact that many small municipalities have had problems of ensuring proper legal and professional case work and that the increased size allows for the use of better administrative resources and more specialized and skilled employees.

It is a widespread expectation that a market oriented value like citizens´ free choice will gain strength after the implementation of the reform. This was also an important official value the structural commission had as point of departure and it has been a very visible part of political rhetoric prior to the reform. What is puzzling, however, is that satisfaction of individual users´ needs does not seem to follow the free choice. An interpretation can be that top managers expect more free choice of services that are becoming more alike, i.e. the same or nearly the same service are expected to be delivered by more than one supplier. The reason behind can be national standardization of services and at the same time a demand for competing suppliers. If this is a general phenomenon the classic Tiebout effect becomes less relevant (Tiebout, 1956). The reduction of local governments from 275 to 98 may intensify this tendency.

If we note the difference in answers from merged and non-merged municipalities another possible explanation presents itself. Scepticism with regard to fulfilment of user needs mainly comes from the merged municipalities. Thus, scepticism may be a result of levelling out differences in services in the former smaller municipalities.

The value that top managers question the most is a value that many would feel is at the very heart of democracy: participation and engagement in local politics. Indeed, this value was also included in the reform commission's criteria (Indenrigs- og Sundhedsministeriet, 2004a: 6). So, if top managers are correct in their expectations we face a public value failure. From a democratic theoretical perspective our data suggests a development from a classic participatory ideal (Koch, 1991) towards a competitive democratic ideal (Ross, 1967). Kjær & Mouritzen (2003) has labelled the latter version as a shareholder democracy, where the municipality delivers services, and the citizen can re-elect the political leadership, just as shareholders can re-elect a new board of directors.

As it is rather well established that the individual participation and trust in local politicians is decreasing with increasing size of local governments (Bogason, 2001: 72) the most evident explanation is of course the merge of many municipalities with a significant increase in size and longer distance between citizens and politicians as the inevitable result. On the other hand, we do not find a marked difference between merged and non-merged municipalities, as top managers from both types of municipalities actually show scepticism towards participation and engagement. This suggests that the above explanation can not be the only one. If we turn to the reform´s expected impact on the influence of different actors an additional explanation is that local politicians are expected to loose influence.

Table 3 displays the expectations with regard to how factors of motivation will be affected by the reform. The main result is that the following factors of motivation are expected to increase in importance: job development, professional commitment and engagement, career opportunities and commitment to the organizations´ mission.

How the reform is expected to affect employee factors of motivation

Table 3

	All municipalities		Merged municipalities		Non-merged municipalities	
	Strengt-hened	Weake-ned	Strengt-hened	Weake-ned	Strengt-hened	Weake-ned
Job development	79 %	2 %	85 %	2 %	66 %	3 %
Professional commitment and engagement	77 %	4 %	82 %	3 %	66 %	5 %
Career opportunities	72 %	7 %	76 %	7 %	59 %	8 %
Commitment to the organizations mission	58 %	9 %	60 %	11 %	54 %	4 %
Managerial acknowledgement	39 %	3 %	43 %	3 %	22 %	3 %
Social factors – e.g. good co-operation	35 %	10 %	36 %	12 %	31 %	3 %
Keeping economic objectives	33 %	8 %	36 %	7 %	20 %	13 %
Good staff-user relations	31 %	9 %	31 %	10 %	31 %	8 %
A good pay	28 %	4 %	30 %	4 %	27 %	1 %
The colleagues acknowledgement	26 %	4 %	28 %	5 %	19 %	1 %

The tabel 3 shows the percentage of local top managers who have answered strengthened or weakened to the question:

"*How do you expect the reform will affect the factors that motivate the employees?*"

Besides factors of motivation top managers were asked how they would expect the reform to affect the importance of employee skills. The results are shown in table 4. A main result is that quite a number of skills are expected to become more important. But there is clearly an emphasis on skills like ability to think strategically, to think new, having a professional drive and show adaptability.

How the reform is expected to affect the importance of employee skills

Table 4

	All municipalities		Merged municipalities		Non-merged municipalities	
	More important	Less important	More important	Less important	More important	Less important
Ability to think strategically	80 %	2 %	82 %	2 %	76 %	3 %
Ability to think new	75 %	4 %	76 %	4 %	72 %	3 %
Professional drive	72 %	2 %	75 %	2 %	65 %	0 %
Adaptability	65 %	3 %	66 %	4 %	62 %	0 %
A good sense for the political situation	55 %	6 %	56 %	8 %	50 %	2 %
Service commitment	53 %	4 %	55 %	4 %	47 %	3 %
Economic sense	50 %	3 %	50 %	4 %	50 %	1 %
Risk-taking	46 %	9 %	47 %	9 %	42 %	8 %
Strong in contact with other people	43 %	8 %	44 %	9 %	37 %	6 %
Personal integrity	40 %	6 %	41 %	7 %	36 %	4 %
Loyalty towards rules	22 %	9 %	24 %	11 %	15 %	3 %

The tabel 4 shows the percentage of local top managers who have answered more important or less important to the question: "*How do you expect the reform will affect the importance of employee skills?*"

Table 3 and 4 together give us a rather convincing picture of local governments as much more professionally oriented. Both professional drive and professional commitment and engagement are ranked highly and correspond neatly with the importance of independent professional standards (cf. table 1). At the same time the innovative and strategically thinking employee is expected to become much more important. Clearly, the transfer of tasks to the new municipalities has created a demand for more educated and professionally trained employees.

On the other hand, not all forms of professionalism are expected to become more important. In table 1 we found that judicial values were expected to become more important, but this is not unequivocally reflected in how skills are ranked. Paradoxically, rule loyalty has the lowest score. Correspondingly, market-oriented values like efficiency and citizens' free choice of services were ranked high in table 1, but business-firm-oriented skills like economic sense and risk taking only got medium scores. The same is the case of keeping economic objectives as factor of motivation.

Contrasting the strong emphasis on a back bone property as professionalism, we also find tendencies of perceiving the new municipalities as arenas for individual self realisation. Career opportunities are ranked in the top, both as a value and as a factor of motivation, and development on the job is the top factor of motivation. Human relation oriented factors as good cooperation, good staff-user relations and acknowledgement from colleagues got medium to low scores. This points less to corps d´esprit than to individualisation. Perhaps even more important, we should note that employee skills as ability to think strategically and adaptability got high scores whereas personal integrity and rule loyalty got low scores. Seemingly, the reform does not promote the classic weberian "beamten".

Indeed, it should be recalled here that values as balancing of interests and the achievement of consensus and compromise are not expected to be strengthened by the reform. Second, factors of motivation and personal skills are likely to become more individualistic and career oriented. The new local governments may suffer from a lack of back bone as a personal skill as adaptability seems to be ranked higher as a result of the reform than personal integrity. Note also that a basic value as a general responsibility to society as such are not expected to be strengthened by the reform. Combined with the

high scores network and career opportunities got, this may remind us of Sennet´s (1998) critical analysis of flexibility and the short time horizon in modern societies.

Finally, one may wonder whether the administrative reform itself is *the* cause of value changes. A reform can be seen as an policy window opening up for changes not linked to the reform and possibly more important than the reform itself.

Concluding remarks

Values can be regarded as the smallest possible and most important building blocks – the atoms of the social world – which we utilize when constructing a social system. What should we go for? Efficiency, sustainability, legality, user orientation or robustness? Yet, values are not easily used. At the surface, values are abstract. When it comes to their usage they must be interpreted and their meaning differ from one individual to another, from one context to another, and from one period to another.

In a time where the public sector of the nation state is challenged the understanding of values is increasingly important. The traditional boundaries of the public sector are blurred by internationalisation, by public-private arrangements and the relations between administration and politics are re-defined by new modes of governance (Beck Jørgensen, 1999). Likely consequences include the emergence of new values, new mixtures of existing values, a growing variety of not easily understood value interpretations and possibly value confusion.

Especially in a time where European countries all are confronted with foreign state traditions and national cultures, comparative studies are important. Oxygen is the same in Denmark, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and Romania; the interpretation and importance of e.g. legality and effectiveness is probably not. This is why comparative studies are particularly difficult - and important.

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