Images of ‘Proper’ Administration:
Public Values and Expertise in the Training and Education of Civil Servants

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Please note this is work in progress

Dr. Toon Kerkhoff
Institute of Public Administration, Leiden University, the Netherlands

a.d.n.kerkhoff@fgga.leidenuniv.nl
1. Introduction
In Europe and elsewhere, debates are going on concerning the legitimacy and competency of the civil service. At stake is which values and expertise are – or should be – associated with ‘proper’ administration and ‘good’ civil servants in the light of changes and challenges of recent times, such as increased citizen participation, politicization or multi-level governance. The core question is whether the values and expertise of civil servants (still) correspond with this changing environment and, if not, what could be done to ensure a competent and legitimate civil service for the 21st century.

This paper outlines a framework for historical comparative research with which to clarify and further this particular debate in academia and practice. It outlines research that investigates the values and expertise associated with ‘proper’ administration and the ‘good’ civil servant in past and present by means of a longitudinal study on values and desired expertise in the content and context of civil service training and education. Because training and education reflect, prescribe and define values and expertise for ‘proper’ administration in particular periods, they offer a valuable mirror with which to assess developments in thinking on ‘proper’ administration, ‘good’ governance and indeed public morality as a whole. This, in turn, can and should also inform present situations.

The paper does not contain empirical data or analysis. Rather, it presents the topic of research in an attempt to sharpen my arguments and receive useful feedback by means of discussion. In the following sections I discuss relevance and a research question, proposed methods of analysis and supposed contributions to theory and practice.

2. Changes, Challenges and the Search for ‘Proper’ Administration
Across Europe, organizations at the heart of government and civil service management are confronting the question of civil service reform. In fact, we find many examples of calls for a ‘new’ kind of civil servant. In England, discussions currently take place concerning emerging executive Masters programs for the
(senior) civil service and whether these will indeed create a ‘better’ civil service.¹ In 2015, the French Ecole Nationale d’Administration (ENA) expressed its desire to want to form senior civil servants of “a new generation”.² In Germany, the Sud-Deutsche Zeitung recently posted (satirical) quizzes to see whether people (still) have what it takes to be a good servant of the state.³ In the Netherlands, current discussion likewise involves the supposed need for a ‘new public professional’ (‘t Hart, 2014).

These debates are fuelled by the central question how the civil service is currently to confront the challenges it faces in a changing social, economic and political environment (cf. Van Berlo, 2011; Bruijn, et al., 2014; Lodge & Hood, 2005; Lodge & Wegrich, 2012; Raadschelders, et al., 2007b). What, for instance, is the impact of new information technology and the use of social media on civil service performance (Mergel, 2012; Snellen & Van de Donk, 1998)? What, also, is the – still considerable – influence of New Public Management thinking (Lynn, 2006)? Has ‘running government like a business’, for instance, led to diminishing attention for public values by civil servants due to over emphasizing ‘private’ values such as market-efficiency and cost-effectiveness (Bozeman, 2007)? Another challenge for the civil service is provided by multi-level governance. This has led to questioning whether the traditional ‘Weberian’ civil servant is still capable of functioning in the horizontal multi-level ‘relational state’ in which a host of public and private stakeholders are involved in the policy process. Is the civil servant, for instance, too ‘traditional’ (read: vertical and hierarchical) to be a public manager in networked governance (Stoker, 2006)?

Yet more changes and challenges beg the question of civil service competence in today’s world. A supposed increase in politicization is one of them. According to some, trends such as increased media influence, an audit culture and an increasingly polarized electorate have led to competition and the pressure to

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¹ Rutter, J., “Educating Jeremy: how will the new Civil Service master’s course make a difference?”, Institute for Government, 13.04.2015. 
http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/blog/11051/educating-jeremy-how-will-the-new-civil-service-masters-course-make-a-difference/


politicize. In these cultures of ‘new political governance’ (Aucoin, 2012), the civil service is engulfed in party politics in a near constant political campaign that runs counter to a tradition of impartiality and nonpartisan management. Have civil servants become Pitkins’ ‘politics’, who act to maximize political position or personal status and use their position to advance a particular political ideology or to gain personal advantage (Wise, 2004: 673)? Related challenges are increasing citizen scrutiny, citizen participation and public visibility of civil servants (O’Leary & Gazley, 2009). Does today’s ‘fish bowl’ of political-administrative life fuel the need for more emphasis on a different kind of civil service competency?

Discussions surrounding the competency of the civil service therefore, first, revolve around desired skills in the sense of expertise and know-how. Should the civil servant be a generalist policy maker or a specialist expert? Should there be more or less of each? Should civil servants perform differently in new settings and, if so, how? What requirements can or should be made for different civil servants? Second, discussions essentially revolve around desired values associated with ‘proper’ administration. What, in short, are the specific values that the ‘good’ civil servant – and by extension the civil service as a whole – should uphold and embody and where might problems be found? Questions are whether the civil servant still is accountable to the public and democratically elected politicians instead of private interests; whether an emphasis on efficiency or outsourcing has led to diminished legitimacy or whether innovation feasible in ‘rigid’ bureaucratic structures? Is transparency guaranteed in public-private partnerships? Are neutrality, impartiality, and integrity under pressure in networks of negotiation? Is the civil servant forced to strike a ‘Faustian bargain’ (Peters & Pierre, 2004) and does this require new public leadership and new moral role models? (cf. Dutelle, 2011; Newcomer & Allen, 2010; Reichard, 1997). Are civil servants becoming entrepreneurial network managers rather than subordinate experts protecting the ‘public interest’ and, if so, whether and how can and should they (still) protect public value (Moore, 1995; Rhodes & Wanna, 2007; Shaw, 2013)?
3. Public Value Dynamics and Changing Ideas on ‘Proper’ Administration in Training and Education

The aforementioned points to a search in academia and practice for renewed or at least reemphasized ethical and practical foundations for the civil service of the 21st century in various countries. However, this search is difficult and confusion reigns as to which values and expertise should then be(come) important and how one is to go about managing all this in the practice of ‘new’ public administration? To clarify and further discussions and to find answers to these questions, this paper proposes historical and internationally comparative research on the core values and desired expertise for Dutch civil servants, as they are embedded in the context and content of civil service training and education since 1945. The Dutch case will be studied in comparison with developments in three other (major) European civil service systems of England, France and Germany in the same period. Since civil service training and education reflects, prescribes and defines core values and expertise at any point in time, it offers a mirror to assess long-term public value dynamics (the change and stability in the occurrence of and meaning attributed to public values over time) and ideas on ‘proper’ administration across different political-administrative systems. The proposed research is therefore historical and internationally comparative. Both elements will be briefly discussed below.

3.1 A Historical Approach

First, the research is historical. In order to understand present debates and offer solutions for present problems, one should also look back (Caldwell, 1955; Pierson, 2004; Raadschelders, et al., 2000; Tilly, 2009). In the words of Jos Raadschelders (2000: 9): “for a proper understanding of contemporary structures and relations in public administration a geographical and historical setting is of great importance [...]. Without knowledge of the geographical and historical context, we are not able to assess the uniqueness or the comparability of societal phenomena”. Historical research allows us to see where current structures (and associated problems) originated and whether current solutions are likely to be successful. In terms of this research topic: historical research tells us where the civil service comes from and when, how and why values and expertise associated with ‘proper’ administration
and the ‘good’ civil servant originated and developed (Raadschelders & Rutgers, 1996: 67; ‘t Hart, 2014: 5-6). Ideas of what is ‘proper’ or ‘good’ are, after all, embedded in the context of changing systems of government over time (Bekke, et al., 1996: 328).

A core underlying assumption of this research is therefore that historical research with an appreciation for context and detail separates the fads and fashions of the day from the more durable and continuous. In this way it becomes possible to assess change and continuity, to separate durable ethical and practical foundations from fleeting buzzwords. It allows one to see what can, therefore, be viable options for reform. The use of an historical approach in public administration is, of course, not new. It is underscored in research on civil service reform and comparative civil service systems (Van der Meer & Raadschelders, 2014: 6-7), in studies on public values (Beck Jørgensen, 2009: 452-456; Beck Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007: 355; Beck Jørgensen & Rutgers, 2014; Moynihan, 2009: 820) and in studies on public affairs education (Fischer & Lundgren, 1975; Hondeghem, 1990: 43-50; Van der Meer, 1998; Van der Meer & Van Nispen, 2000). Yet, it remains a underutilized in studies on public ethics, public values and public value dynamics (see Kerkhoff, 2016; Kerkhoff & Wagenaar, 2016) as in work on public affairs education.

### 3.2 An International Comparison

Second, the research is internationally comparative. While the main focus is on the Netherlands, international comparison is necessary to provide contrasting material. The research proposes to look at the following three countries for contrast with the Dutch case: England, France and Germany. All four countries show self-evident similarities, such as a liberal-democratic outlook and advanced market economy (cf. Allum, 1995). Additionally, all four countries witnessed quite similar discussions on civil service reform and a search for new foundations in recent years (Bezes & Jeannot, 2013; Dreyfus, 2010; John Greenaway, 1995; Hoffmann-Martinot & Wollmann, 2006; Majumdar, 2012; Rouban, 2013). Seeing differences and/or similarities vis-à-vis other, surrounding, political-administrative systems, provides a basis for a proper understanding of the Dutch situation. A detailed comparison of context and content of training and education offers unique comparison and
contrast to put Dutch developments in perspective. Furthermore, such in international comparison enables critical reflection on the influence the three ‘big administrative traditions’ of European governance may have had on the Netherlands and vice versa (Van der Meer & Dijkstra, 2000: 148).

4. A Framework for Empirical Analysis
The proposed research will focus on context and content of pre-entry and post-entry training and education programs for national civil servants in the countries mentioned, in three core policy domains between 1945 and the present. These elements will briefly be outlined in the following.

4.1 Content and Context of Training and Education
Useful empirical historical sources to assess public value dynamics and changing requirements of expertise are hard to come by. However, context and, especially, content of training and education form interesting but largely overlooked sources for analysis. Since the context and content of these programs are observable, tangible and explicit, they are – as mentioned – a mirror for otherwise largely implicit and intangible (dynamics of) values, expertise and ideas over time. Training and education also offer relatively stable sources for research with which to circumvent problems usually associated with comparative research on civil service systems due to different administrative, political, and social environments (Bekke, et al., 1996: 326-327). In addition, the study proposes to look at pre-entry as well as post-entry training and education. Pre-entry includes the kind of university education and/or basic entry exams to test skills and basic knowledge for (senior) civil servants. Post-entry includes training and education after civil servants have been hired (either as paid employees or as interns). This includes either career related and relatively long-running programs – as was customary for entering larger corps-like structures such as the military, the police and the civil engineers – or more short-running training programs. The latter are applicable to larger corps-like structures as well but also to job systems, usually for smaller groups of civil servants at specific ministries. Importantly, post-entry training also often takes the form of on-the-job learning. The
research is especially interested in post-entry training and education since it is expected that here specific values and desired expertise are especially articulated.

**Content of Programs**

The research aims to look at content of training and education programs, consisting of the actual modules or courses provided, from which to distil both (more tangible) competencies, abilities and expertise as well as (more intangible) desired behaviour, virtues and values. In short: what were civil servants expected to know, how were they expected to behave and what values were considered important? The research will aim to build a typology of cognitive and affective competencies (abilities, practical competencies and knowledge as well as general behavioural characteristics and expressed values) as these are written down in procedures, regulations, requirements and curricula. This includes both formal and informal training and education. With regard to the former, initial frames of reference can be derived from competency management literature (Bowman, et al., 2010; Horton, et al., 2002), training and education literature (Van Wart, et al., 2014), public sector leadership studies (Illiash, 2013; Raffel, et al., 2009; Steven, et al., 2008; Van Wart, 2011) and literature on categories of public values (cf. Beck Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007; Rutgers, 2008; Van der Wal, et al., 2013). With regard to the latter, i.e. informal training and education (especially pertinent in post-entry training on the job as in learning-by-doing), the research aims to look at ideas on the shop-floor, from such sources as diaries and letters of people involved. In addition, the research proposes interviews with retired and current civil servants.

**Context of Programs**

The study will not look at programs in isolation. Instead, it will take into account their wider context as well to discover public values and desired expertise. This includes the political and social circumstances in which the structure and content of programs is shaped. For this, the project aims to look at previously undisclosed and/or under-analyzed sources on civil service reform (such as reports from a variety
of research and advice bodies⁴), at plans to reform training and education programs specifically and university history (where often both pre- and post-entry education is offered). Popular or scientific treatises on civil service values, including (auto)biographies of civil servants, and the already mentioned interviews likewise offer interesting sources for the context of training and education programs.

4.2 National Civil Servants in Three Core Policy Domains Since 1945
A look at context and content of programs offers material to map core values and expertise over a long time period with relatively stable source material, and also allows one to trace change and continuity and difference and similarities in international comparison. The research will limit itself to training and education programs for national civil servants as these, arguably, set the general standard for the civil service as a whole. At the same time, however, this will happen in close connection to the local level, which in some countries (such as the Netherlands, see Raadschelders, et al., 2007a: 303-304) has been instrumental in ‘bottom-up’ civil service reform. Furthermore, variety within the national civil is not ignored, such as distinctions between higher, middle and lower level civil servants and/or between civil servants who make, execute or supervise public policy. Since this can easily lead to attention for different values, programs for different types of national civil servants will be taken into account. To avoid confusion, distinctions such as the English and French division between generalists and specialists or the German difference between Beamte and Angestelltte will be kept in mind (Raadschelders, et al., 2007a: 304-305).

Because departments or ministries cannot reasonably be compared due to too much historical variation and change over time (cf. Bagchus & Bekke, 1994; Van Ijsselmuiden, 1988), this research instead focuses on national civil servants in a selection of policy domains. These will be Justice and law and order, Finances and Economics and Education. These three domains represent core areas of national public administration over time in the four countries and the period under review.

⁴ Examples of sources to investigate the context abound. We can think of, for instance, state committee reports from the Netherlands such as the Repelaer van Driel report from 1822 (Van der Meer, et al., 2015). We can also think of re-investigating the origins and contents of more well-known reports such as Northcote-Trevelyan (J. Greenaway, 2004).
Finally, with regard to periodization, the research chooses to focus on the period 1945 – present. This starting point is based on the availability of sources as well as the strong growth since then of the Dutch welfare state following WWII and subsequent increased attention for bureaucracy, career policies and a ‘modern’ civil service (Fischer & Lundgren, 1975; Hondeghem, 1990; Raadschelders, 1997; Raadschelders & Rutgers, 1996).

5. Contributions to Theory
The research aims to contribute to the disciplines of public administration and political science in general and to the research areas of civil service reform, public value dynamics and public affairs education in particular. These three will be briefly discussed.

5.1 Civil Service Reform and Comparative Civil Service Systems
Knowledge of the values and expertise associated with ‘good’ civil servants (not public employees, see Raadschelders, et al., 2007a: 303) answers open questions from key publications in the area of civil service reform and comparative civil service systems. As it traces ideas on the desired profile of civil service competencies in different political-administrative arrangements over a longer period of time, the research aims to offer new analysis of the normative foundations of civil service systems (Raadschelders, et al., 2007a: 307, 313). The research also critically engages the link between national political-administrative traditions and change, continuity, differences and similarities of values (Van der Meer, et al., 2008; Painter & Peters, 2010).

5.2 Public Values, Public Value Dynamics and Public Value Management
The research offers new ways to assess integrity of government (Huberts, 2014) as well as public service values (Molina & McKeown, 2012). This study does not aim to categorize values from academic literature and/or codes of conduct (cf. Van der Wal, 2006; Van der Wal, et al., 2013). It also does not aim to identify specific value ‘trade-offs’ (cf. Beck Jørgensen, 2009; Van Gestel, et al., 2008; De Graaf & Van der Wal, 2010). Rather, it aims to offer a rare view on longitudinal public value dynamics, i.e.
the change and stability in the occurrence of and meaning attributed to public values over time (cf. Beck Jørgensen & Vrangbæk, 2011: 486; Kerkhoff, 2013: 18-19) with unique source material on training and education. This is not only meant to inform the study of public values as such. It also helps assess the long-term impact public values might have on actual public action (Davis & West, 2009). In short, it can help assess questions such as whether civil servants have (or should?) really become ‘entrepreneurial network managers’ rather than subordinate experts protecting the ‘public interest’ and, if so, whether and how can and should they (still) protect public value (Moore, 1995; Rhodes & Wanna, 2007; Shaw, 2013)?

5.3 Public Affairs Education, Competency Management and Public Employment
Training and education are obviously vital components of a competent and legitimate civil service (cf. Van Wart, et al., 2014); thus, their content has long since attracted attention (Fischer & Lundgren, 1975). Furthermore, a large part of the aforementioned search for new ethical and practical foundations is specifically focused on the role of ethics in civil service training and education (cf. Carrizales & Bennett, 2013; Reichard & Röber, 2009, 2012). This research adds absent empirical evidence regarding the function of ethical content in training and education. A focus on values and change, continuity, differences and similarities of ideas on the ‘good’ civil servant over time and in different contexts, offers new views on the ethical implications of a dynamic and changing environment of government for the education and training of the civil service of tomorrow (Carrizales & Bennett, 2013; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2009; Raadschelders, 2003: 82-85; Schröter & Röber, 2012; Schultz, 2012, 2013). In addition, it can offer fresh perspectives on best-practices in public employment regimes in Western countries and the Netherlands in particular (cf. Gottschall, et al., 2015).

6. Contributions to practice
Apart from contributions to theory, the proposed project is meant to aid our understanding of current needs to define a competent and legitimate civil service for the present and the future. An excellent civil service is, after all, of primary importance for government and society. Therefore, an essential aim of this research
is to help achieve such excellence. First, knowledge of the values associated with the
‘good’ civil servant has practical use because it offers a nuanced historical understanding of the ‘good’ civil servant. This helps (re)establish desirable values, expertise and behaviour in what are clearly uncertain times – as discussed earlier in this paper – concerning very real societal debate on the core qualities of the ‘modern’ public manager. Second, this research aims to aid the debate across Europe about how to improve training and education that is currently offered by a plethora of organizations and initiatives (see for the Netherlands: Blok, 2014). Fundamentally, variety leads to uncertainty about what is on offer (practical skills and also normative reflection?), when it should be offered (pre-entry University education? Post-entry training and education? Learning by doing?) and who should offer it (government? Private institutions? Universities?).

As such, the research aims to contribute to discussions concerning the sustainability of a well-functioning civil service and presents ideas to invest in human capital by means of education and training, in a national as well as a so-called European administrative space (Olsen, 2003; Sager & Overeem, 2015; Trondal & Peters, 2013). Furthermore, knowledge of different (international) approaches and traditions is likely to serve public officials, strategic government advisors on civil service reform, politicians and HR-staff. Finally, the research seems relevant for international policy and knowledge institutions such as the OECD and its attention for governance, public sector innovation and strategic workforce management, national policy communities of the countries under review, such as the Dutch Institute for Government Management, England’s Civil Service Commission, Germany’s Institut für den öffentlichen Sektor or the French Direction générale de l’administration et de la fonction publique.

7. Concluding remarks
The aforementioned has outlined the main elements of a proposed research plan for the coming years. In brief: the project aims to serve ‘academia’ as it hopes to offer a valuable combination of history, public administration and public values studies. It also aims to offer new insight into the workings of civil service reform and comparative research of normative and practical foundations of civil service systems
and new insight into the question when, why and how public values change over time. Finally (and not mentioned before) the aim is to generate a database of training and education programs for further research on these topics. The wider policy community is helped as well. The project aims to offer insight into normative foundations for these uncertain times and into the institutional design of training and education. As such the research hopes to offer viable options to help create a legitimate and competent civil service for tomorrow.

8. References

Fischer, W., & Lundgren, P. (1975). The recruitment and training of administrative and technical personnel. In C. Tilly (Ed.), The formation of national states in Western Europe (pp. 456-561).


