Mandarins vs. Machiavellians? On differences between work motivations of administrative and political elites

ABSTRACT

This article explores how work motivations differ between administrative and political elites, based on 94 qualitative interviews conducted in the Netherlands, European Union, and United States. Both elite groups are primarily motivated in their initial choice of public service by wanting to contribute to, serve, or improve society; job content, career opportunities, political ideals, and personal background are also important motivators. Once in public service, serving society remains important, but politicians differ from public managers in that they want to have a big impact and bring about actual societal change, and they consider themselves best equipped to do so, whereas the latter value intellectually stimulating work more than anything else. Motivational categories for both groups are relatively stable across institutional settings. Theorizing on the results, the author offers seven propositions for future research. This article contributes to the research on motivation in the public domain by using qualitative methodology and including politicians.

INTRODUCTION

Why should we care about the motivations of those who govern us? We should care, in the words of Rhodes, "because the decisions of the great and the good affect all our lives for good or ill" (2011, 1). More specifically, individually and together, political and administrative elites have the most substantial impact on "what gets proposed for consideration by governments, what gets passed into law, and how law gets implemented" (Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman 1981, 24). Therefore, gaining insight into their ulterior motives and motivations is paramount, particularly when populist forces continuously question and scrutinize such motives.

Indeed, negative cliché-type imagery of opportunistic, Machiavellian "office seekers" craving power and status versus conservative, self-interested "technocrats" motivated by job security and regular office hours has long dominated both popular and academic discourse (Niskanen 1971; Schlesinger 1966; Tullock 1976). However, the recent proliferation of studies of public service motivation (PSM) emphasizing altruism and a desire to work for the greater good reflects a countermovement to this cynical discourse (Perry, Hondeghem, and Wise 2010).

So far, however, PSM research has focused exclusively on public employees and neglected politicians (Ritz 2011, 3). Moreover, despite their obvious relevance, studies that compare the work motivations of senior politicians and administrators, or "government elites" (Rhodes 2011; Rhodes, Hart, and Noordegraaf 2007), are completely absent. In our study, we do not aim to find out what government elites do and *how* they do this (cf. Rhodes 2011), but rather *why* they chose to answer the call of public service in the first place and continue to do so within the most powerful echelons of government.

In particular, we want to compare whether political elites, on the one hand, and administrative elites, on the other, differ in how they motivate their initial choice for government and the acquiescence of their current function. We do so by analyzing qualitative in-depth interview data from a convenience sample of 94 (former) government elites in three prominent Western "centers of power": the Netherlands, European Union (EU), and United States.[1] We provide "an asset to the body of research" on motivation in the public domain because such "thick data" allow us to develop "more shades of grey" (Vandenabeele 2008, 302). Our exploratory study seeks to answer the following central research question: *How do initial and current work motivations differ between politicians and public managers?*

Answering this question is relevant, as recent dynamics in professional contexts and role conceptions (Gains 2009; Hart and Wille 2006) lead to pressing questions that contravene the conventional wisdom on what motivates both groups. Are modern-day public managers, confined by immense responsibilities and workloads and mandatory job rotation, at all motivated by job security, regular office hours, and work–family balance? Are their motives perhaps more similar to those of politicians because they increasingly fulfill "political" roles, as scholars have suggested? (Hart and Wille 2006; Lee and Raadschelders 2008). Or, alternatively, do their motivational profiles resemble those of their private sector counterparts, with remuneration and career opportunities crowding out intrinsic motivators such as recognition and self-development? (Moynihan 2008). And what actually motivates politicians in an era of declining public trust, increasing populism, and overt "assaults on the elite"? (Van der Wal 2012). Do political elites have high levels of PSM, or are they different beasts driven by ego, fame, and a place in the history books?

A final, more overarching question is whether politico-administrative motivational differences are universal. The seminal work of Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman (1981) shows that the worlds of both elite groups overlap much more in the United States than in Europe. However, as their study was conducted in a very different era, their emerging

"politico-administrative hybrid" (261) might be a reality in many countries nowadays, with motivational congruence between both groups and between settings as a result. Recent cross-country PSM research provides us some insights into how work motivations differ between settings (e.g., Brewer, Ritz, and Vandenabeele 2012; Kim et al. 2012), but these studies focus exclusively on the civil service. Given the size and composition of our sample, we cannot deliver a comparison that is in any way representative. However, we can deliver initial insights into the universalism and consistency of politico-administrative motivational differences across settings that differ considerably in terms of both elite groups' career dynamics, formal and informal political–administrative relations, and distribution and media scrutiny of decision-making power (see Aberbach and Rockman 2000; Nugent 2010; Van der Meer 2011). Such insights are potentially of great interest to current debates on motivation in public contexts.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Government Elites

We now discuss and define our key concepts. First of all, whom we actually consider members of the government elite—and why—is a question that needs to be answered here, albeit shortly. To demarcate the concept of "elite," we can refer to the classical works of Pareto (1935, 1422), who distinguishes between nonelite ("a class that is ruled") and elite ("a class that rules"), which, in turn, comprises a governing and a nongoverning elite. Broadly interpreted, the governing elite, then, is "an organized minority with the political power to make decisions" (1423–24). Building on Pareto, Frissen states that elites are those who execute power within the public domain, permanent as a societal group but "contingent in their appearance" (2009, 99). More specifically, we study *government* rather than *governing* elites, including legislative, executive, and administrative public officeholders occupying senior positions as elected representatives, ministers and secretaries, and members of the senior civil service.

Motivation

What, then, do we actually mean by "motivation"? A useful definition is offered by Perry and Porter, who conceive of motivation as "the forces that energize, direct, and sustain behavior" (1982, 29). Pinder (1998) offers a very similar definition, specifically related to "work," describing motivation as "internal and external forces that initiate work-related behavior, determining its form, direction, intensity, and duration" (quoted in Perry and Hondeghem 2008, 3). The concepts of "motivation," "motive," and "motivator" are often intertwined, and the distinction is conceptually not that clear (Steijn 2006). Illustratively, both Perry and Wise's (1990, 368) classical definition of PSM and Perry and Hondeghem's (2008, 3) description of public sector motivation include the word "motives." In this study, we use these concepts pertaining to the internal and external forces that influenced government elites to accept their first government job and to acquiesce and retain their current (or most recent) position.

Arguably, the former is more complex to designate, not only because making respondents explain and justify choices made (in many cases) decades ago invokes challenges related to cognitive dissonance (Vroom 1966), but also because a variety of factors come into play here. Studies show that socialization factors such as parental employment, education, or religion are important (De Graaf and De Graaf 1996; Perry 1996; Van der Wal and Oosterbaan 2013), while others even wonder whether certain genes influence career choices

(Arvey et al. 1989; Brewer, Selden, and Facer 2000, 261). In short, even before choosing a career in a particular sector, some are more likely than others to become members of the government elite (cf. Searing 1969). Such reasoning harks back to Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman's (1981, 67) notion that political and bureaucratic elites are similar in that they are often male, highly educated, and have family members who are politicians or bureaucrats, too (see also Bovens and Wille 2011). Deciphering the *genesis* of elite careers lies beyond the focus of this research, but our data will show whether elites themselves mention background and education as factors related to their initial choice of government.

We realize that relations between sector motivation, career motivation, and job motivation are highly complex. However, it is not the aim of our study to disentangle, contrast, or correlate these concepts, as others have done adequately in recent studies (e.g., Christensen and Wright 2011; Kjeldsen and Jacobsen 2012). Rather, based on our exploratory data, we simply categorize and compare which internal and external forces politicians and public managers consider crucial in explaining why they answered the call of public service, initially (sector and career) and most recently (job), taken together here as "work motivations" (cf. Buelens and Van den Broeck 2007; Pinder 1998).

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivators

Such internal and external forces are often described, and contrasted, in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators (Buelens and Van Den Broeck 2007; Perry and Hondeghem 2008). *Intrinsic* motivators include job content, self-development, recognition, autonomy, interesting work, and the chance to learn new things; *extrinsic* motivators include pay, security of tenure, career perspective, position and power over other people, pension systems, and work–family balance (Buelens and Van den Broeck 2007; Houston 2000; Karl and Sutton 1998; Khojasteh 1993; Perry and Hondeghem 2008). Perry and Hondeghem (2008, 3) associate the latter category with public *sector* motivation and not with public *service* motivation or PSM.

Indeed, almost all definitions of PSM developed over the years emphasize altruistic motives that go beyond self-interest and aim at serving some larger entity or community (see Rainey and Steinbauer 1999; Vandenabeele 2008), but scholars have warned not to view PSM and intrinsic motivation as similar (see Perry and Hondeghem 2008). Still, PSM clearly emerged as a response to cynical perceptions of rational, self-interested, and purely extrinsically motivated "bureaucrats" depicted by rational choice and public choice theorists (see Frederickson and Smith 2003; Tullock 1976).

PSM and 'Political' Motivations

It is highly plausible that the four dimensions making up Perry's (1996) initial PSM construct—attraction to public policy making, commitment to the public interest and civic duty, compassion, and self-sacrifice—supplemented with Vandenabeele's (2008) "democratic governance" dimension, apply to administrators as well as politicians. Yet we simply do not know, as "studies on PSM discuss the motivation of public sector employees and not of politicians" (Ritz 2011, 3). Moreover, according to Pedersen, the concept has from the start been "removed" from the ideological and political realm: "PSM is distinct from aggregate constructs such as shared values and norms on how things ought to be, and from political ideologies about what the role of the state and the public sector should be in the economy in general and in the delivery of public services in particular" (2010, 3). She points out that the "attraction to public policy making" dimension clearly does not aim to survey politicians, as one of the scale's items is "I don't care much for politicians" (2010, 4). Pedersen's first-ever

test of PSM among politicians does, however, show that Danish local councilors attain high scores on "commitment to the public interest and civic duty" (2013, 11).

The sheer absence of politicians in recent debates on motivation in the public realm is striking. Without focusing explicitly on motivations, classical elite studies suggest axiomatic differences between the worldviews and character types of politicians and administrators (Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman 1981; Searing 1978). They conclude that politicians often possess strong ideological, even "activist," worldviews that they want to express and materialize though a career in politics. Unsurprisingly, left-wing politicians generally have a stronger activist profile than their rightwing counterparts, who value a certain level of stability and status quo and, as such, are more similar to "bureaucrats" (Searing 1978, 76–77). Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman's third dimension on which political and administrative elites differ captures such character differences by contrasting "energy" (passion, idealism) with "equilibrium" (pragmatism, caution). Such a contrast harks back to Weber's (1919) earlier distinction between the "pugnacious politician" and the "expert-driven administrator" (cf. Wilson 1887).

The vast differences between party profiles and electoral systems in the settings that we study do not allow us to differentiate respondents according to political color. However, it is very likely that the work motivations of political elites are influenced by political ideology, making them want to *change or improve* rather than *serve* society through public service, as PSM suggests is the case for administrators. Th at said, we are reluctant to formulate research hypotheses, let alone testable propositions, at this point because of the lack of consistency and cohesion between the bodies of literature discussed. Rather, we use our exploratory data to formulate propositions on how motivators diff er between politicians and public managers and what this means for current theories, including PSM.

On a final note, we realize that other constructs beyond motivations are important in choosing a sector and driving government elites in doing what they do. Previous studies have shown that holding or aspiring to specific *public values* such as impartiality or social justice (Van der Wal, De Graaf, and Lawton 2011) and having strong sector perceptions (Van der Wal and Oosterbaan 2013) also affect (provisional) sector choice. Rayner et al. (2011) include both individual values and motivation in their conceptualization of a public service ethos that supposedly drives many public sector workers, while Andersen et al. (2013) show some correlations between PSM dimensions and specific public values. However, our design and analysis do not allow us to study such correlations in detail, nor do they aim to do so. How our design and analysis did come about, we describe in the next sections.

METHODOLOGY

In-Depth Elite Interviews

We employed qualitative methods because we wanted to know how particular motivators matter and how they are worded. Aberbach and Rockman state that "[i]nterviewing is often important if one needs to know what a set of people think, or how they interpret an event or series of events, or what they have done or are planning to do" (2002, 673). Therefore, we provided respondents with the opportunity to address issues that they considered important themselves, often resulting in a common understanding and interpretation of the concept at hand (Alvesson 1996, 465). Moreover, "elites especially—but other highly educated people as well—do not like being put in the straightjacket of close-ended questions" (Aberbach and Rockman 2002, 674). Consequently, we used semistructured interviews consisting of "a set of questions carefully worded and arranged for the purpose of taking each respondent through

the same sequence, and asking each respondent the same questions with essentially the same words" (Patton 1987, 112).

Elites are, by definition, less accessible and more conscious of their self-interest than less prominent respondents. This is exactly why elite interviews are relatively rare (Richards 1996). As a consequence, the data that we collected are unique, but they should be handled with care as well. It would be naive to act overly trusting toward individuals who are very well equipped to "spin" facts and events, "play" interviewers, and dominate and take over conversations entirely. In fact, they would never have become government elites had they not developed such skills. Nevertheless, almost all conversations were open, critical, and often quite intense. Not one respondent felt the need to substantially change or revise, let alone censor, transcripts or view interview questions beforehand.

The interview ratio was rather basic. We used an interview guide, "a listing of areas to be covered in the interview along with, for each area, a listing of topics or questions that together will suggest lines of inquiry" (Weiss 1994, 48).[2] Following an introductory talk, we started with two questions on which this paper reports: "Why did you initially choose for government"' and "Can you list three specific motives or motivations to acquiesce your current function?" The in-depth conversations that followed lasted between 40 and 70 minutes, depending on time availability and progress. We interviewed 94 respondents between May 2010 and August 2011. About 95 percent of the interviews were face-to-face and took place within the respondents' professional environment. Only a few were conducted at home, at railway restaurants, or at our university.

Who we Interviewed and Why

Rather than selecting respondents randomly based on probability parameters, our selection aimed at maximizing range and depth (Weiss 1994, 23). We applied a combination of at-random probability sampling and convenience sampling because we had limited possibilities to gain access to elites—especially outside the Netherlands—through our own network or "snowball sampling" (Weiss 1994, 26). This is also the main reason that the number of interviewees differs substantially among our three samples. However, we stress once more that we do not attempt to generalize results beyond the selected populations, let alone generalize them statistically. Because comparative qualitative data on elite motivations are nonexistent, we needed to start somewhere. Furthermore, we use the different institutional environments as "most different" contexts—to assess the extent to which differences between functional groups hold—and not independent variables. To put it more directly, we compare *elite groups in different systems* and not systems as such.

Finally, although convenience sampling may not be the ideal base for generalization, good reasons exist for using this technique here: (1) the respondents' own assessment of generalizability, (2) the interviewer's own identification of others worth recruiting, and (3) "the idea that a certain amount of universalism with regard to the phenomenon studied, exists among a certain group of respondents" (Weiss 1994, 26). Table 1 lists the respondents.

We invited all 150 members of the Dutch parliament to participate in May 2010, 16 of whom responded positively, representing seven out of 10 factions across the political spectrum. Such a low response rate is common for politicians at the national level (see Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman 1981; Van den Heuvel, Huberts, and Verberk 2002). In addition, we approached about 60 (deputy) ministers of the last nine cabinets (1982–2010), mainly through our personal networks.

Table 1. Interviewed (former) government elites by type, function and party affiliation if applicable/known (n between brackets; total n=94)

	Politicians	*Public Managers*
The Netherlands	*Member of Parliament (MP):* ▪ MPs Christian-Democrats CDA (6) ▪ MPs Socialist Party SP (3) ▪ MPs Liberal Party VVD (3) ▪ MPs Christian Union CU(1) ▪ MPs Social-Democrats PvdA (1) ▪ MPs Freedom Party PVV (1) ▪ MPs Dutch Pride TON (1) *(Deputy)Minister:* ▪ One-term Minister (5) ▪ Two-term Minister (4) ▪ (Dep.) Prime-Minister (3) ▪ Four-term Minister (1) **Total:29**	▪ Director of Agency/Quango (14) ▪ Departmental Director (12) ▪ (Dep.) Secretary-General (6) ▪ Director-General (3) ▪ Inspector-General (1) **Total:36**
EU	*European Parliament (EP):* ▪ EP Christian-Democrats CDA (1) ▪ EP Christian Union CU/SGP (1) ▪ EP Social-Liberal Party D66 (1) ▪ EP Green Left GroenLinks (1) ▪ EP Social-Democrats PvdA (1) ▪ EP Liberal Party VVD (1) **Total:6**	▪ (Dep.) Head of Unit (7) ▪ Director-General (1) ▪ Director (1) ▪ Head of Sector (1) **Total:10**
US	*Representative:* ▪ Member of NY State Assembly, Dem. (2) ▪ Member of City Council, Dem. (1) *(Deputy)Minister:* ▪ Two-term Cabinet Secretary, Dem. (1) **Total:4**	*Career-based appointment:* ▪ Managing Director (2) ▪ Chief Operating Officer (1) ▪ Dep. Attorney General (1) ▪ Senior Advisor (1) *Political appointment:* ▪ Ambassador (2) ▪ Chief of Staff (1) ▪ Assistant Secretary (1) **Total:9**

In all, 13 responded positively, many of which held multiple cabinet positions throughout the years, including a former prime minister and three so-called state ministers.[3] Public managers were randomly selected from the online database of the Algemene Bestuursdienst (ABD; Senior Executive Service).[4] We interviewed 22 "regular" members and 13 members of the top management group, which consists of the 70 most senior Dutch public managers (in total, ABD has about 800 members).

In Brussels, we interviewed all six Dutch faction leaders of the parties represented in the European Parliament, except for the Freedom Party, which had just entered the European Parliament for the first time. In addition, we recruited 10 senior public managers from the various directorate-generals with different national backgrounds through our personal networks. Our American interviewees represent a more diverse group. Because we had more trouble accessing respondents and because politicians at the level of Congress and the cabinet are almost impossible to reach, even for respected U.S. academics (cf. Aberbach and Rockman 2002), we interviewed whomever was accessible and met our general criteria. In the end, our interviewees included a (former) majority leader of a large state assembly and the president of a large municipal council, a two-term cabinet secretary, two (former) ambassadors, a chief of staff of a cabinet secretary, and several members of the Senior Executive Service employed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Management Budget, and Government Accountability Office. We rightly admit that the selected sample of elites displays considerable variance. However, all respondents hold or have held government positions that yield considerable power and influence, resembling characteristics of government elites studied in authoritative publications (e.g., Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman 1981; Rhodes, Hart, and Noordegraaf 2007; Searing 1978).

Issue-Focused Between-Group Analysis

Because the primary objective of this study was to portray motivational patterns for two groups of government elites, the data analysis was *issue focused* rather than case focused and took place at the "level of the generalized" rather than the "level of the concrete" (Weiss 1994, 152). Thus, single respondents and cases were less important than the objects of analysis: the most important motivations for a government career. The aim of issue-focused analysis is "to describe what has been learned from all respondents about people in their situation" (Weiss 1994, 153)—in other words, to paint a general but at the same time contextual picture. According to Eisenhardt (1989), it allows the researcher to recognize general patterns in different settings.

We transcribed every interview, resulting in immense quantities of data (more than 1,000 pages of text) that needed to be systematically analyzed. Coding of these literal transcriptions began after we imported all interviews as separate "hermeneutic units" into Atlas.ti 5.2 and created a monster grid—a data matrix with the respondents on one axis and the core issues on the other, which is a more elaborate version of what Weiss (1994, 157) calls "excerpt files." The next step involved reading all of the responses to a particular question to derive first impressions of overall patterns that were then juxtaposed with the empirical data. This inductive process, described by Weiss as "local integration" (1994, 158), is clearly not just a matter of counting. As a result, we repeated the inductive process many times before we wrote our first analysis.

However, as Strauss (1987) rightly argues, data analysis is not simply a question of retrospective comparison. Rather, analysis begins as soon as there is data collection. Indeed, as Miles and Huberman observe, "the more investigators have developed understandings during data collection, the surer they can be of the adequacy of the data collection and the less daunting will be the task of fully analyzing the data" (1994, 49). In the same vein, we started coding our data chronologically, regardless of whether the interviewee was a politician or a public manager. Such an approach has two important advantages. First, our analysis is much less biased by our own attitudes toward both groups than it would have been had we separated both groups before categorizing their answers. Second, by developing all categorizations *first* and juxtaposing them against our six subsamples (political and administrative elites in three institutional settings), we could immediately compare how they

distributed between both groups *and* prevent comparing dissimilar categories (cf. Eisenhardt 1989; Weiss 1994).

Coding and reporting

Each relevant quotation (309 in total) received an initial "open code" that characterized the statement's core. During a process of going back and forth, more definitive codes were established as new codes were created or old ones adapted (cf. Klostermann 2003, 43). In the final analysis, we translated our codes into motivational categories. Because qualitative data analysis is as much "data reduction" as quantitative data analysis (cf. King, Keohane, and Verba 1994; Miles and Huberman 1994), we tried to limit the number of categories for each group by grouping resembling statements across groups into identical categories.

For instance, "Spouse approval," "Having a job gave me personal autonomy," and "Balance between professional and private life" were brought together as a single category: "Personal rather than professional reasons and motivations (including work–life balance)." "The complexity and intellectual challenge of the job," "Interesting work," and "The function's daily relevance" were merged into a final category: "The function's complexity, challenges, and relevance ("interesting work")." Categories that had not been construed before and included only one quotation (outliers) were merged or eliminated, including those considered too setting specific, such as "working on a better Europe," which we included in "I want to contribute to, improve or 'serve' society." In the end, 22 categories remained, eight of which are unique for politicians and four of which pertain only to public managers (10 of the categories are shared). The appendix provides an overview of the frequency of initial codings and how they distributed across the three settings before they were merged into the final 22 categories.

Given the nature of our analysis, we categorized by counting statements and not individual respondents. Moreover, as the number of respondents differs—sometimes substantially—between both groups and between settings, we compare how statements rank rather than how often they are mentioned, as shown in tables 2 and 3. Finally, we structured our observations around seven propositions. These propositions serve to explain the content of empirical categories and allow us to theorize on our findings while, at the same time providing a concrete avenue for quantitative follow-up studies. We use some of the most characteristic quotes of participants to illustrate our propositions.

Discussion of Findings

In the Beginning…

Proposition 1: The primary initial motivator for both political and administrative elites is the wish to contribute to, improve or serve society, followed by 'politics' (not government) for political elites and 'job content' for administrative elites.

When asked why they initially chose public service, both elite groups mention the wish to contribute to, improve, or "serve" society most frequently and most prominently. Politicians associate contributing to or serving society with "moving the country or the world in the right direction" and "doing the right thing" (R#90, 91), while public managers express a desire "to better order and structure society" (R#61).

However, many politicians state they entered government not as a deliberate career choice but because "the time was right"—in fact, many members of parliament do not even consider themselves to be "working for government" or "employed by the public sector," as

shown in table 2. Politicians emphasize the sense of urgency to govern and change society or the inevitability of their rise within their political party:

> I kind of "got into it." I considered our party to be a proper vehicle to fight injustice. I started to engage in more and more political activities, and asked myself the question: Shouldn't I take a more leading role? After heading the party's youth movement, I was asked to join parliament. I get the question more often: When did you become a politician? I think I never did and never will because I'm not in it for myself. (R#22)

Table 2. Ranked Initial Sector Motivation of Politicians and Public Managers

Politicians (n=39)	Public Managers (n=55)
1. I want to contribute to, improve or 'serve' society	1. I want to contribute to, improve, or 'serve' society
2. Not a deliberate choice for *government* but a deliberate choice for *politics*	2. The function's complexity, challenges, and relevance ('interesting work')
3. I was asked, invited, or 'urged' to do the job	3. A logical step given my personal background and/or education
4. The function's complexity, challenges, and relevance ('interesting work')	4. A more or less coincidental choice during my 1st round of interviews
5. A logical step given my personal background and/or education	5. 'Government' provides good career prospects and opportunities
6. *Issue-specific* but *politically motivated*: I want to change things and sit in the driver's seat	6. Personal rather than professional reasons and motivations (incl. work-life balance)
7. 'Government' provides good career prospects and opportunities	7. *Issue-specific* but *not necessarily related to government*
8. I have valuable (professional) skills that are beneficial to government	8. I want to be part of something bigger than myself, have a big impact
9. A logical step after climbing up through the party's ranks	9. I was asked, invited, or 'urged' to do the job
10. I believe in democracy and the bureaucratic process and I want to do a good job spending public money	10. I believe in democracy and the bureaucratic process and I want to do a good job spending public money
11. I like the independence, to be 'responsible to no one' except to my constituents	
Total number of statements: 47	**Total number of statements: 57**

As "socialization factors" such as background and education are mentioned only by a small number of public managers and a few politicians, we can only partly confirm their reputed importance (e.g., Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman 1981; Perry 1996). A minority of public managers admit that they entered government by coincidence, often to never leave again because of the content of their work, which brings us to proposition 2.

Job Content Superior Compared to Business

Proposition 2: The content of the job—its complexity, intellectual challenges, and relevance—is more often a key motivator for public managers than for politicians; in fact, it is the main motivator in their current job.

Many public managers derive their professional rewards from the societal relevance and complex intellectual challenges of their job, especially later in their careers (see table 3): "To me the game of governing is challenging. You have to untie knots and solve complex equations. To put it sharply: You will never end up in such situations from the monolithic

perspective of a company. It is one big intellectual challenge and that is why I like working for the central government so much" (R#18). Some even go as far as to say that their jobs satisfy their curiosities and fulfill their "addiction" to public sector life: "Firstly, the content of the work was a motive. I find the bottom line complex and therefore much more interesting. It cannot be reduced to a quite simple calculation. I find the complexity, the necessary trade-off s and the judgments with regard to how do we reconcile all the things that we want in society intellectually stimulating" (R#56).

Many senior public managers value the dynamic career opportunities that government provides nowadays, enabling them to obtain even more challenging positions every few years:

> If you like this type of work, the mind-set of "having a larger goal," your domain is immense, and a lot happens constantly. I started as a lawyer, but I also worked in the fields of security and social work. You get all these opportunities if you are willing to work for them. I am not the best in my current field, but I can get along. And that is the challenge of public management nowadays, quickly becoming expert enough to supervise the experts. (R#75)

Arguably, frequent job rotation does not necessarily obstruct public managers from becoming "experts," a process they consider to be rewarding as well.

In fact, many of the public managers we interviewed list the complexities and intellectual challenges of their job as being decisive in their decision to stay in the public sector and reach the highest echelons. They often mention that their work environment, in this respect, is superior to that in private sector organizations (cf. Karl and Sutton 1998): "My job is as least interesting as those of my siblings that work in business. To conclude, government is a very attractive employer" (R#76). This corroborates that public executives are not primarily motivated by New Public Management–inspired competitive salaries and performance rewards (cf. Boyne 2002).

Both legislative and executive politicians also frequently mention job content as a motivator: "I'm very interested in how governments make decisions. I have a great interest in policy making at the highest levels" (R#92). This indicates that the PSM dimension "attraction to policy making" (Perry 1996) also applies to politicians. Interestingly, however, politicians are much more explicit in relating their own skills and capacities to the content of their job. This brings us to our next proposition.

Ego, Capacity and the Pride of 'Being Asked'

Proposition 3: Compared to public managers, (executive) politicians are more often motivated by having an "impact" and pride themselves for being equipped with the necessary skills and expertise.

Political elites mention "being urged or asked to do the job" more often as the most important motivator (see tables 2 and 3). Moreover, only politicians, and executive politicians in particular, often mention that they have valuable skills and expertise that they have to—periodically—donate to the public cause in order to change and "impact" society: "I want to be part of something bigger than myself, have a big impact" (R#89). They rightly admit to being motivated by self-confidence and vanity as least as much as a classic selfless public service ethos: "To be honest, my ego was involved, too" (R#92). Ministers in particular are motivated by the opportunity to "sit in the driver's seat" and tackle specific policy problems from their ideological position: "As a minister you're able to really shape policies in those

11

areas where you can make a difference. In order to leave your mark on contributing to the wellbeing of society in the way you think is the right way" (R#44).

Thus, opportunities to exert influence and power certainly drive political elites, who feel able to make a difference during their term and change society according to their worldviews (cf. Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman 1981). Not many respondents, however, admit to being extrinsically motivated by power, purely for the sake of having power. This suggests that we should view politicians as being guided by both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards rather than either self-interest or altruism. Still, politicians are more attracted by the spotlight of public office than public managers. All in all, though, our results corroborate those of Pedersen (2013, 11), who argues that councilors who attain a high score on the PSM dimension "commitment to the public interest" also assume that they have more political influence: "This type of motivation leads to stronger work eff ort, and stronger work effort leads to higher political influence. Politicians seek political influence, not just to maximize narrow self-interests, but also to do good for citizens and the public at large, and the perception of having influence motivates councilors to continue in politics" (Pedersen 2013, 12).

Being in Close Proximity to Power

Proposition 4: Both elite groups are motivated by having power, but being in proximity to power motivates public managers only and increasingly as they move higher up the ladder.

Still, being in a position of power, so as to have "influence and impact," certainly is a distinct motivator according to the elites we interviewed. Interestingly, public managers more often than politicians explicitly mention "operating in close proximity to political power ("in the lion's den") and "having influence and impact" among the key motivators in their current job: "You matter, you can do things for better or for worse. We're talking about immensely influential positions. If you like having influence, and I do, this is a wonderful career choice. If you are a good secretary-general, your minister always follows your advice" (R#41). Our results resonate with those of Ritz, who argues that senior public managers value "the proximity to power and the opportunity to influence the policy process" (2011, 4). A key finding is that administrative elites only list this motivator for their current job and never for their initial job. Evidently, their proximity to power increases as they become "more elite."

Motivated by Issue Rather than Sector

Proposition 5: If elite work motivation is issue specific, it is politically motivated and thus government related for politicians but not necessarily related to government for public managers.

A more specific subset of this motivator is the ability to exert influence over specific issues that elites consider crucial for advancing society. Gailmard refers to this as "issue-specific motivation": "One of the reasons why work in the EPA would be intrinsically rewarding is because an agent considers environmental protection to be particularly intrinsically important" (2010, 40). Here we see an interesting nuance in how the two groups differ, as shown in table 3. A number of public managers, initially but particularly later in their careers, considered the policy area they work in to be their main motivator (cf. Kjeldsen and Jacobsen 2012). They even go so far as to say that they could very well work on the same issues in the business or non-profitt sector: "Well, principally there's no difference. If you work in business often you also serve government. If my job content would be similar within a company I would also enjoy myself. So don't expect me to tell you a missionary story about

the public interest…Whether you work here or in our main harbor, we all do this on behalf of society" (R#13). Surprisingly, we find both senior experts and generalist public managers in this category.

Politicians also sometimes enter government to improve a specific policy issue, but they choose the political arena deliberately to be able to really make a difference: "My motivation to enter politics was very clear: it was about time individuals with real-life expertise in the area of children with behavioral deficiencies got involved in political decision making. My drive is to really change things for those children who have been expelled from school more than five times" (R#2).

Table 3. Ranked Current Job Motivations of Politicians and Public Managers

Politicians (n=39)	Public Managers (n=55)
1. I want to contribute to, improve, or 'serve' society	1. The function's complexity, challenges, and relevance ('interesting work')
2. The function's complexity, challenges, and relevance ('interesting work')	2. I want to contribute to, improve, or 'serve' society
3. *Issue-specific* but *politically motivated*: I want to change things and sit in the driver's seat	3. To operate in close proximity to political power, to have 'influence and impact'
4. I have valuable (professional) skills that are beneficial to government	4. *Issue-specific* but *not necessarily related to government*
5. I want to be part of something bigger than myself, have a big impact	5. 'Government' provides good career prospects and opportunities
6. I was asked, invited, or 'urged' to do the job	6. I was asked, invited, or 'urged' to do the job
7. A logical step after climbing up through the party's ranks	7. A good salary and/or job security
8. Personal rather than professional reasons and motivations (including work-life balance)	8. Personal rather than professional reasons and motivations (including work-life balance)
9. A logical step given my background and/or education	
10. A good salary and/or job security	
11. I want to express my personal political views through my position	
12. Close the gap between politics and the citizenry	
Total number of statements: 78	**Total number of statements: 128**

Administrative Elites' Motivations Slightly More Extrinsic

Proposition 6: Both elite groups are driven by a *mix* of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, but the composition of such a mix is slightly *more extrinsic* for *administrative elites*.

Classical extrinsic motivators such as status, pension systems and salary are of negligible importance for politicians; 'balancing work and private life" ranks as least important by public managers, while none of the politicians' statements fall into that category. However, public managers rank "Government provides good career prospects and possibilities" fifth out of 11, initially as well as currently. All in all, our results do not support the cynical "public choice" discourse (Niskanen 1971; Tullock 1976). Here, however, for the first time, differences relate predominantly to institutional background. Only EU elites make explicit statements on salary and job security. They also consider the international dimensions of the job, including opportunities to work with a variety of skilled colleagues, to be a "perk" (cf. Ban and Vandenabeele 2009). This observation brings us to our final proposition.

Proposition 7: Motivational differences between political and administrative elites largely hold across institutional settings, with some local "accents" related to cultural and institutional factors.

The six foregoing propositions largely hold across institutional settings, implying a certain universalism in how both groups' motivations differ. Politicians and public managers' motivations are slightly more homogeneous in the EU and United States than in the Netherlands, but this might be influenced by sample size. Three regional and cultural peculiarities are worth mentioning here (refer to the appendix for an overview of initial categories per setting). First of all, public managers and politicians in the EU and United States more often explicitly mention their country or territory than their Dutch counterparts: "To serve the public is doing something important for the nation. I grew up like this, to do something for my country, America" (R#89), or "I wanted to become an EP for a long time, because I got caught by the 'Eurovirus.' The importance of Europe has increased substantially since then, resulting in threats as well as opportunities" (R#64).

Second, the EU's institutional features—having no formal cabinet and opposition and a relatively safe and stable political environment with little media attention (Nugent 2010)—might explain why EPs are the only politicians in our sample who mention job security and salary as motivators: "I have the best job security of all Dutch politicians, because in our system no cabinet resigns. You never have to resign, and you cannot make a mistake like a minister who would be forced to step down. In comparison you operate in calm waters. My job security is very, very well taken care of" (R#66). Taking into account that civil servants earn at least 30 percent more on average than in EU member states, it is not surprising that they, too, mention salary and benefits as important motivators, expressed in statements such as these: "Because the salaries are good, I wouldn't deny this" (R#53), "The pay is good, let's be honest" (R#56), and "Why the Commission? Because it's the same sort of work as in the British civil service, but better paid. It's not fair if I didn't mention that" (R#54). Our results resemble those of Ban and Vandenabeele: "salary/benefits and career opportunities motivate EU civil servants as much as working in an international organization and building Europe" (2009, 10).

Third, even though *both* public managers and politicians in our study portray motivations resembling Perry's PSM dimensions, in particular "attraction to public policy making" and "commitment to the public interest and civic duty," U.S. politicians in particular also express "compassion" and, to a lesser extent, "self-sacrifice," lending support to the claim that PSM has a slightly "American character" (cf. Vandenabeele 2008).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

When commencing this study, we knew that our sample would never be large enough to generalize conclusions to groups of government elites, let alone countries and systems. Moreover, our results are undoubtedly slightly "colored" by the overrepresentation of Dutch respondents in our sample. However, the universalism in the answers among political and administrative elites—within but also across settings—allows us to draw conclusions about government elites in the studied contexts. Still, we are unable at this point to comprehensively refute current theory or propose substantial alternative theories; we merely propose incremental contributions and alterations to the study of motivations in the public domain. Another shortcoming is that we did not differentiate between politicians with different party backgrounds. We did not, however, detect many motivations that were too "party specific" to

fi t in the more general categories. Still, respondents regularly framed the direction in which they want to change or improve society in more socialist or liberalist terms.

It would be too easy here just to propose a large quantitative follow-up study among government elites in different countries, even though we have provided propositions that such a study could test. After all, we still know little of how specific contextual factors related to countries and governance systems might (indirectly) affect motivational differences. Additional elite interviews within the EU, EU member states, and the United States would greatly add to the validity and range of our results. Extending our database would allow us to build substantial research hypotheses that compare explicitly countries and systems. Even though the political discourse in Western countries nowadays is rife with notions of "corrupt elites" (Frissen 2009), limiting our comparison to countries generally ranking high on Transparency International's corruption perception index allows us to consider their idealistic motives—at least somewhat—credible.

That said, we should not be naive in blindly accepting elites' accounts of their public service ethos, with serving the public interest being the prime motivator (cf. Schlesinger 1966). First of all, interviewing or surveying well-spoken and highly intelligent individuals about their own conduct, values, or motivations inevitably suffers from a degree of social desirability bias. Second, even though many of our respondents have skill sets that are worth many times their current salary in a private sector environment and still chose public service, or at least did so for considerable parts of their career, former government elites—especially politicians—often start second careers as lobbyists or business executives with salary increases up to 1,452 percent.[5] The "revolving door" and "sector switching" (Bozeman and Ponomariov 2009; De Graaf and Van der Wal 2008) merit much more consideration in future research, in particular with regard to elite career paths and salary increase.

CONCLUSION

Elite Motivations: Mandarins vs. Machiavellians?

At first glance, we are tempted to conclude that initial and current work motivations of political and administrative elites are as similar as they are different. In all, 10 of the 22 motivational categories that we distinguished are listed by both groups—often in similar order—and many of the "unique" categories are minor and related to country-specific features. Clearly, both government elites are motivated most of all by wanting to serve, improve, or contribute to society and by the content, impact, and challenging character of their jobs.

However, at second glance, important differences emerge. Often, the devil is in the detail. Political elites are motivated by being *in power,* whereas being *close to power* motivates administrative elites. Also, politicians feel the need to *laud their own capacities and achievements,* whereas public managers perceive themselves as *thankful objects* of the immense intellectual challenges that their careers have confronted them with. Even though both elite groups work together to tackle the same complex policy issues, one group is motivated by *being in the spotlight,* while the other appreciates *operating behind the scenes* (albeit in the lion's den). A substantive minority of the elites we interviewed rank issue-specific motivation highly, but within this category, we see the classic distinction between pugnacious politician and expert-driven administrator. Classic public sector motivators such as salary, job security, career prospects, and work–life balance are mentioned more often by administrative elites, corroborating popular imagery and theory. Categories only mentioned by one of both groups—"being in close proximity to power" by public managers and "climbing up through the party's ranks" by politicians—relate exclusively to function and

traditional role conception. On a final note, the larger number of categories distinguished by political elites despite their smaller sample size in this study suggests that their work motivations are more diverse than those of administrative elites.

Our analysis does not support cliché-type imagery of administrative elites being Mandarins and political elites being Machiavellians, but it cannot entirely refute such images either. In fact, a rather complex mix of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators drives both groups. The composition of this mix varies slightly between the studied settings, and it changes over time as careers progress and rank-and-file bureaucrats and backbenchers truly become members of the government elite. Moreover, both categories of motivators are often interrelated. For instance, the challenges involved in being the administrative or political boss of more than 30,000 employees produces many intellectual rewards and contributes to one's self-development while producing immense societal status and position, power, and influence at the same time. Current literature often treats these sets of motivators as dichotomous rather than continuous and intermixed. Our study shows that thick description of work motivations results in insightful shades of gray on what really drives public leaders.

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NOTES

1. All but one respondent had held previous public sector or political functions before being appointed to their current or previous job (in the case of former elites). Many of our respondents held many prestigious public service positions throughout their careers, which is exactly why they can be considered members of the government elite. However, only very few respondents switched between administrative and political careers. Would this have been the case, it would have considerably 'polluted' our sample and analysis. Because we wanted to avoid such pollution, we deliberately choose these three institutional settings. Would we have chosen France, Italy, China or Singapore, to name a few, elite careers would be characterized by continuous overlap and back and forth switching between the worlds of politics and administration.

2. Three expert interviews, with Joel D. Aberbach (UCLA) Paul 't Hart (ANU), and former Western Australia premier (and now academic) Geoff Gallopp (University of Sydney), were very helpful in fine-tuning the interview guide and the interview setting.

3. For the sake of clarity and consistency, we decided to analyze representatives and ministers together as 'politicians' even though their functions and career paths (and thus their motivational categories) differ sometimes. In our analysis, we highlight such differences if relevant.

4. See www.algemenebestuursdienst.nl [in Dutch] (accessed July 16, 2013).

5. See e.g., http://www.republicreport.org/2012/make-it-rain-revolving-door/ (accessed July 16, 2013).

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Appendix 1. Frequency of total number of coded statements for each setting

	Initial	Current
NL (n=65)	▪ I want to contribute to, improve or 'serve' society (23) ▪ Not a deliberate choice for *government* but a deliberate choice for *politics* (6) ▪ I was asked, invited, or 'urged' to do the job (5) ▪ The function's complexity, challenges, and relevance ('interesting work') (6) ▪ *Issue-specific* but *politically motivated*: I want to change things and sit in the driver's seat (3) ▪ A logical step given my personal background and/or education (7) ▪ A more or less coincidental choice during my 1st round of interviews (6) ▪ I have valuable (professional) skills that are beneficial to government (2) ▪ 'Government' provides good career prospects and opportunities (4) ▪ A logical step after climbing up through the party's ranks (2) ▪ Personal rather than professional reasons and motivations (2) ▪ *Issue-specific* but *not necessarily related to government* (2)	▪ I want to contribute to, improve, or 'serve' society (45) ▪ The function's complexity, challenges, and relevance ('interesting work') (30) ▪ To operate in close proximity to political power, to have 'influence and impact' (12) ▪ *Issue-specific* but *not necessarily related to government* (9) ▪ *Issue-specific* but *politically motivated*: I want to change things and sit in the driver's seat (7) ▪ 'Government' provides good career prospects and opportunities (6) ▪ Personal rather than professional reasons and motivations (6) ▪ I have valuable (professional) skills that are beneficial to government (5) ▪ A logical step after climbing up through the party's ranks (3) ▪ A good balance between my professional and my private life (3) ▪ I want to express my personal political views through my position (2) ▪ I was asked, invited, or 'urged' to do the job (2) ▪ Close the gap between politics and the citizenry (2) ▪ A logical step given my background and/or education (1)
	Total number of statements: 68	**Total number of statements: 133**
EU (n=16)	▪ 'Government' provides good career prospects and opportunities (4) ▪ I want to contribute to, improve, or 'serve' society (3) ▪ A logical step given my personal background and/or education (3) ▪ Not a deliberate choice for *government* but a deliberate choice for *politics* (2) ▪ I was asked, invited, or 'urged' to do the job (2) ▪ *Issue-specific* but *not necessarily related to government* (1) ▪ A good balance between my professional and my private life (1)	▪ To work on a 'better Europe' (8) ▪ A good salary and/or job security (8) ▪ The function's complexity, challenges, and relevance ('interesting work') (8) ▪ The chance to work with interesting and skilled colleagues in an international environment (4) ▪ I was asked, invited, or 'urged' to do the job (2) ▪ I want to contribute to, improve, or 'serve' society (2) ▪ *Issue-specific* but *not necessarily related to government* (2) ▪ A logical step given my personal background and/or education (1) ▪ A logical step in my political career after climbing up through the party's ranks (1) ▪ To operate in close proximity to political power, to have 'influence and impact' (1)
		Total number of statements: 36
	Total number of statements: 16	

| **US (n=13)** | • The function's complexity, challenges, and relevance ('interesting work') (6)
• I believe in democracy and the bureaucratic process and I want to do a good job spending public money (4)
• I want to contribute to, improve, or 'serve' society (4)
• I want to be part of something bigger than myself, have a big impact (3)
• A logical step given my personal background and/or education (1)
• Personal rather than professional reasons and motivations (1)
• I like the independence, to be 'responsible to no one' except to my constituents (1)

Total number of statements: 19 | • I want to contribute to, improve, or 'serve' society (13)
• The function's complexity, challenges, and relevance ('interesting work') (9)
• I want to be part of something bigger than myself, have a big impact (5)
• I was asked, invited, or 'urged' to do the job (4)
• Personal rather than professional motivations (3)
• 'Government' provides good career prospects and opportunities (2)
• A logical step given my personal background and/or education (1)
• My ego was involved too (1)

Total number of statements: 37 |