How policymakers define their jobs: a Netherlands case study.

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POLICY WORK AND
THE STATE BUREAUCRACY
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How Policy Workers Define Their Job: A Netherlands Case Study

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Introduction

This chapter reports a study of civil servants doing policy work at the Dutch Ministry of Education, Sciences and Culture (ES&C) in the late nineties of last century. After a brief discussion of the status of policy-analytic work in the Netherlands, we narrow our focus to practices of policy formulation. A study of the professional self-images of policy workers is linked to criteria by which they judge the quality of the policy documents they produce. Finally, we discuss implications of the findings for understanding the nature and professional teaching of policy work.

Policy Work in the Netherlands

Like English, Dutch has separate words for politics ("politiek") and policy, namely "beleid." Somewhere in the beginning of the 20th century, "beleid" became a buzzword. Like the French playwright Molière's character who, to his own surprise, discovered he had been speaking prose all his life, so the Dutch started fancying "beleid" or policy over "politiek" or politics, implying a role for those engaged in policy work as 'statesmen' of certain prudence and wisdom rather than 'mere politicians.' (Van de Graaf & Hoppe, 1989:15–18).

Although Dutch politics talked "beleid" for centuries, the word itself gained popularity in the first half of the 20th century. This was the period of the emergence of policy work in the bureaucracy. Formal policy work started out
as policy relevant data collection and simple statistical analysis by economists and statisticians, as in the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), established in 1892. Policy analysis proper was first institutionalized in the Central Planning Bureau, under the leadership of Jan Tinbergen, the only Dutch economist to win a Nobel Prize. The CPB used econometric modeling as a policy-analytic tool for its economic forecasts of the state of the Dutch economy in general as well as ex ante evaluation of alternatives for economic policy. Only recently, the close interaction between scientific modelers and the bureaucratic policy workers inside the Departments of Economic Affairs and the Treasury Department has been acknowledged (Den Butter and Morgan, 2000).

The big push for policy work and policy analysis in the Netherlands came from the policy and the social indicator movement in the United States in the late sixties and early seventies of last century. In the universities, policy analysis and policy evaluation were incorporated into the curricula of political science, sociology, and since the mid-seventies, primarily the public administration academic programs.

In the seventies, new independent knowledge institutes were created that offered jobs to policy workers, like the Scientific Council for Government Policy (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, WRR) and, mimicking the economists’ successful lead, the Socio-Cultural Planning Bureau (Sociaal-Cultureel Planbureau, SCP). Probably the single most important influence in creating policy work at departmental level was the Commission for the Advancement of Policy Analysis (Commissie Ontwikkeling Beleidsanalyse, COBA), representing an official effort by the Treasury Department to introduce program budgeting as a standard policy-analytic method and procedure in all national departments. Although the project eventually failed (Klaassen, 1995), in all departments scores of policy staff became familiar with standard policy-analytic methods like cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analysis, and the more usable and pragmatic methods of policy evaluation. Lately, the program-budgeting initiative has been revived by the Treasury Department and the National Court of Audit, under a new label, “From Program Budgets to Policy Accountability” (e.g., Van der Knaap, 2000; Klaassen and Spanik, 2004).

In the eighties and nineties, policy work in all its forms was successfully commercialized. The larger organization and business consultancy firms incorporated divisions for public policy analysis. Policy consultancy in the Netherlands now is a small industry by itself, with a turnover of EUR 100 million in 1999 (Etty, 2000); partially due to governmental reforms that imply outsourcing of policy work as privatization strategy. Some MP’s even expressed anxieties about the potential political impact of this ‘sixth power.’

Therefore, at present, policy work is a fairly large niche in the job market for knowledge professionals. Policy workers’ jobs easily run into the tens of thou-
sands to include jobs in the administration, the higher education system, knowledge institutes with policy advisory tasks, private consultancy firms, vested interest and lobby groups (primarily labor unions and employers’ organizations, but also in the health care sector) and non-governmental organizations.

In the rest of this chapter, our focus is on policy workers in the administration. A few words on the Dutch system of civil service are in order here. The Dutch civil service system is based on merit. There are no comparative entry exams; educational background, previous work experience and motivation are the three important recruitment criteria. In essence, this means that each department has its own recruitment policy. Heady classifies the Dutch civil service system among the policy receptive systems, in the sense that “members of the civil service, as part of their professional preparation, are socialized to defer in policy matters to political officials outside the ranks of the civil service itself...” (Heady, 1996: 223).

In the administration, there is a distinction between implementation and policy-analytic roles. Civil servants in the former role are called ‘administrators’ (“bestuursambtenaren”); in the latter role, ‘policy functionaries’ (“beleidsambtenaren”). In both categories there is a distinction between managerial or leadership positions, and staff positions. Generally, policy staff is expected to do policy work at an academic level, on the basis of rational expertise, and (bureaucratic) skills in consensus-building or policy harmonization (Van Braam, 1986:202).

Professional Self-images

In the following sections, we present our findings based on a Q-method research among 22 civil servants heavily involved in policy work, ranking from director-general to junior staff member, employed by the Ministry of ES&C in 1996/7. We chose to take as a model the research by Durning and Osuna (1994) among policy analysts in the United States. The 39 statements from their study were translated and adapted to the Dutch situation. The statements cover a range of topics: main responsibilities and purposes of policy analysts, the sources of legitimacy, proper activities, definitions of success and failure, and the broader context of a civil servant’s work. (Durning and Osuna, 1994: 635)

We identified five relatively highly correlated factors representing five types of policy functionaries. The high correlation suggests a relatively large field of shared opinions and convictions.

We registered a clear consensus on the great importance of the political and social context within which one works. All respondents found it necessary to
emphasize that their work is a part of a pluralistic system. Respondents were optimistic about their own contribution and the meaning of their work, which was hopefully ‘broader than only serving the minister.’

The attitude towards politics was generally positive and not controversial. The simple fact that one department employed all respondents, means that they, with quite significant differences in nuances, could not or would not consider politics as a ‘necessary evil.’ Also, they all agree that a policy analyst would not put his or her own interest first, but the interest of the minister. The specific way this interest is taken into account differs substantially among the different groups of respondents, as we will see further.

This implies that civil servants should accept tasks from the minister without protest. Loyalty, after all, defines what is acceptable:

Attorneys have the advantage that in principle they could refuse a task. As a civil servant, you do not have this opportunity.

This work in a political context and the positive attitude toward the minister means that all respondents consider it a necessity to develop not only the policy alternative, but also the implementation strategy. Many of them immediately add that this is more an ideal than a reality, however. Partially, this is due to the shared feeling of realism and modesty when it comes to the cognitive and intellectual powers of policy analysis.

If only they would listen to us with our tremendous analytical insight and would not follow their own preoccupations . . . It does not work that way! Social issues are never to be reduced to a simple truth.

Dutch respondents are obviously more impressed by the limits of rationality than their American counterparts. The interviews also demonstrate that the majority of the respondents are skeptical towards concepts such as objectivity and neutrality. At the same time, they admit that you can hardly work without them.

The claim that there is only one best solution to a problem invokes unanimous negative reactions. Alongside bitter irony (“usually there is not even one good solution to the problems I deal with”), respondents express serious concern about the underlying reasoning in this statement:

This is the biggest risk for policy analysts, to go directly to a solution and to get so deeply involved in it, that they would be not capable to see any alternatives. And then they completely panic when the director . . . or the minister says: yes, but did you also consider making a left turn here?
We could summarize this rather broad spectrum of not contested statements in a number of simple rules of thumb:

- Take into account the political and social context of your work; you serve the political incumbents, and hopefully, by this, society at large;
- Be sympathetic towards the minister, accept his orders.
- Do not be overly confident in your own expertise, ‘objective’ information, ‘hard’ number and forecasts.
- Work hard, but do not exaggerate your involvement.

This framework of shared attitude still allows for a specific style and perspective of different types of policy analysts. In the sections below, we present the profiles of the five types of policy analysts, based on the five factors extracted through the Qsort analysis.

**Type A: The Process Director**

Process directors face the same dilemma as all other respondents: to find a balance between their attitude toward the minister and their own convictions about a certain professional value, ‘technocratic competence.’

Just like the experts and the policy philosophers described further, they choose the role of an actively involved counselor to the political commissioner. They find this involvement in politics self-evident.

The areas of their expertise and thus of their interest are process management and process monitoring. The art of tactful steering is a part of their craftsmanship.

Without a certain amount of field expertise and authority, it becomes quite difficult to manage and lead such processes. This is a part of the craftsmanship of policy development and advisory work. You have to appreciate the substance as well as the process. However, for your own success, it is very important that you engage in games. But still, you may not use unfair tricks. This is not good for your technocratic competence.

**Type B: The Policy Philosopher**

This group goes the farthest in redefining the role of the policy analyst in these post-modern times. They accept and do not necessarily attempt to ‘resolve’ the tension between their own views and those of their commissioner:

On the one hand, analysts try to be in service of their employer, on the other, they have their own social responsibility.
The policy philosophers consciously keep some distance from politics, in order to take a critical stance if necessary.

You have to *show that there is another reality out there* next to the one of the policy decision maker-politician... there are more choices to be made where you have to rely in the first place on your own expertise.

To be aware and to make others aware of other possible worldviews and their implications is a central part of the work of the policy philosopher.

**Type C: The Policy Advocate**

The name ‘advocate’ was borrowed by Durning and Osuna (p. 632) from Jenkins-Smith’s ‘client’s advocate.’ The main task of the client’s advocate is to defend the interests of their commissioner. This type of analyst is a fervent promoter of the minister’s positions: “Politics is the boss.” Whereas for the other types concepts like objectivity and neutrality are still a source of professional identity, in the eyes of the advocates these ‘old-fashioned’ views only create conflicts between politicians and civil servants. For this group, the conflict between professionalism and loyalty is solved by the attitude: our professionalism is completely in service of the minister. They keep their personal opinions for themselves:

Based on logic, once in a while you could find something and say that it does not work, [but] *having too much of an opinion over an issue, no, in my opinion at least, it is not appropriate.*

The advocates justify their name through a strongly positive ranking of the following statement: “The policy analyst is a producer of policy arguments, more similar to a lawyer than to an engineer or a scientist.” More than the other respondents, they consider their role in the process of policy formation legitimized by the minister.

**Type D: The Neo-Weberian**

This group, just like type E, the experts, is quite similar to the ‘objective technician’ described in the study by Durning and Osuna. (1994, 638 ff.):

I try to . . . develop a policy as objective and as value neutral as possible.

The boundary between politicians and civil servants and the consequent task division are clear for the neo-weberian:

I think that political strategy should be defined mainly by politicians.
And still, they are not exactly the classical objective and neutral bureaucrats. It seems that they are trying to fit this ideal to a changing reality. They operate in an uncertain, dynamic situation with conflicting interests and goals. Thus, they are involved much more in the process and the political aspects of policy development than before.

In the past you had money and projects, . . . and the illusion that you were changing the world . . . But today . . . you have to influence much more, to try to convince people . . . [You have to] be more diplomatic, to have an insight in steering processes, and a keen eye for power relations.

Naturally, the statement “The proper role for the analyst is to provide objective advice about the consequences of proposed policies” enjoys high approval. The neo-weberian’s interest in implementation and consequences of policy is also quite clear and goes further than sheer intellectual curiosity.

Type E: The Expert Adviser

The respondents in this group see themselves as equal partners and advisers to politicians, similar to the process directors and the policy philosophers. However, they base their influence on their professional skill as objective advisors. They draw on ‘technocratic’ expertise and present themselves as guardians of objectivity and quality in the process of policy advice. They perform their work in the framework of strict distinction between the responsibilities of politicians and civil servants:

Very clearly, this is advisory work . . . to present as objectively as possible what is behind the policy proposals, and at the same time to realize that you [in your role as an advisor] come across limits and should respect them, namely that you should leave the decisions about values to politics.

This type of ‘technocratic’ expert is not afraid to assume a very important role. He reacts quite skeptically, together with the process director, to the demand not to let his analysis be influenced by personal preferences and values. This insistence on personal contribution is an important feature of the expert. He believes stronger than his colleagues in the right to influence policy in a direction that is the best according to him.

Five Types, One Typology?

In order to explain the five types beyond the phenomenological and purely practical description, we sought ways to clarify them as a manifestation of a continuum of claims about professionalism. Professionalism can be seen as a
socially recognized monopoly in solving a certain type of problem. Policy analysts are engaged with analyzing and solving political and social problems by means of policy and on behalf of the government. By this they rely on two sorts of knowledge and skills: problem-specific knowledge and skill, related to the specific field of policy issues; and policy process directed knowledge and skill, related to the specific context, institutions, organization, and repertories in which the processes of problem finding and problem solution take place—in this case policy processes in the public sector.

While employing these two sorts of knowledge and skill, the policy analyst is lead by two types of loyalties: professional-analytical loyalty, rooted in the analytic skills acquired in specific professional or academic education; and political loyalty, rooted in the professional socialization of civil servants in the Dutch civil service system (see section 2) and in the specific political context within which they operate.

The combination of the dimension of knowledge and skills with the loyalty dimension results is a typology in which the five types could be placed:

![Diagram](image)

**FIGURE 3.1**
Types of Policy Workers

Before discussing the implication of these findings, we turn to the second part of our study. With the same respondents, during the same interview, we conducted a second Qsort on criteria for policy documents. The study design and the study outcomes are presented in the following paragraph.
Quality Criteria for Policy Documents

The starting point of this research are numerous studies on quality criteria. The distinct impression is that these studies not only contradict each other, they tend to stress inherent contradictions in requirements and expectations around policy documents. For example, a common argument is that policymakers are often forced to weigh the demand for timely delivery of a policy document against the requirement for broad support and quality (George, 1980).

Martha Feldman (1989) demonstrates that policy makers often have contradictory ideas about the main function of a policy document. Some are very much oriented towards decision and solution of specific problems. Others insist that the paper should interpret and ‘filter’ information from the outside world and serve an ‘enlightenment’ function, encouraging decision makers to take another perspective on issues. Still others see policy documents as multi-functional documents that only turn out to be ‘usable’ in a lucky coincidence of actors, information, and time.

The requirements also differ according to a basic view on the nature of policy making. The particular accent here is on the types of argumentation employed in a good policy paper. If policy-making is depicted as a thought process of elaborating an idea into a design, then strong arguments and clear reasoning are favored. If, on the other hand, policy preparation is seen as a process of negotiation in which a political standpoint becomes the core of a policy proposal, then ‘slick’ argumentation and compromise seeking are indispensable. (Hoogerwerf and Snellen debate in Bestuurswetenschappen 1984). In their own practice, policy analysts are forced to make choices and set priorities. There is little research on when and under what conditions certain criteria are accepted or rejected (e.g. Walraven 1991).

In our research, we address the following questions:

- Do respondents agree on the requirements for a ‘ideal’ policy paper?
- Do respondents agree on the use of certain criteria for judging specific policy products?
- Is there a connection between an ‘ideal’ policy product as they see it, and the judgment on specific policy products?
- The statements for the qsort addressing these questions included the criteria on basic orientation of the document, timeliness criteria, criteria pertaining to political feasibility, financial and juridical elements, criteria for sound and ‘slick’ argumentation.

The sort was made with the same set of 22 respondents, immediately after the first qsort. In addition to the qsort, we presented our respondents with a
number of policy documents, produced by their own organization. They were asked to give an opinion about the documents and to explain which criteria they apply for that particular document. These comments were interpreted in the light of the criteria qsort.

We extracted four factors with quite a low correlation. This confirmed the impression that the differences in views were quite significant. It became obvious to us that respondents referred to different basic functions of the policy document. This is why we name the four factors after an underlying image (‘Gestalt’) of the policy document: the analytic report, the political advocacy, the expert advice and the policy essay.

Type 1: The Analytic Report

The basic function of the document here is the policy-analytic support of a policy decision. The analytic report is written according to strict rules, formal as well as substantial. ‘Clarity,’ ‘pure argumentation,’ ‘accessibility,’ ‘understandable,’ in short transparency, are top priority for this type of document:

Decision making [should] be as clear as possible, as open as possible. Arguments should be laid on table and that should be written down in order to know later how things have gone. As a civil servant . . . you need to take into account the political dressing . . . [but] it is precisely your task to take care that the non-political part is also represented. Is there anything easier than repeating whatever the minister wants politically?

More than the other types, this document has the function of registration. It should facilitate the process of decision-making, even if it does not immediately offer a specific solution for a policy problem:

A good policy product should be a sort of means to come back to later, to cover all bases.

Type 2: The Political Advocacy

From this perspective, the policy document is mainly a political plea, designed to optimally serve the minister in achieving his goals. The ultimate measure of the value of this document is defined by politics. A good political advocacy relies mainly on the convincing power of arguments. Soundness and clarity are only important within the limits of the political game. The author of a political advocacy strives to write “through the eyes of the minister”:

A policy document should serve the minister optimally, and in this sense it explicitly takes into account, and includes the perspectives of the relevant parties involved.
In general, this type of document is solution oriented, especially when ‘the line is already clear,’ which often means that one has to operate within fixed financial conditions. An advocacy is a means in the hands of politics:

You do not expect a minister to engage in reflection, rather to make governmental choices in a political process. So if you just enjoy yourself writing beautiful papers on general developments in society.

‘Slick’ argumentation is characteristic for the political advocacy. Always the most convincing arguments are sought. Or else “you make yourself always vulnerable, you weaken your position.”

**Type 3: The Expert Advice**

The function of an expert advice is to provide a detached and sound reflection on the solution of a policy problem. In such a document, the language is clearly not political:

Clarity and effect—these are the two priorities that I consider the most important . . .

You try to specify things clearer [than the politics]. If you do that in the same terms, then you do not help politics either.

The expert advice is also strongly solution oriented:

A good policy proposal does more than reducing misery. It attempts to give a positive solution as well.

An advice is up to standard only when it is sound and consistent. The principal viewpoint is clearly analytical. Even though “the political environment” is taken into account, acceptability is a finishing touch to soundness and not the other way around.

**Type 4: The Policy Essay**

The profile of the policy essay is relatively less sharply defined. This is also consistent with the smaller number of respondents defining this type. The essay has the function of new ideas generator and goes ‘against a present rigidity’ in policy development. In an essay, the main theme is long-term policy rather than the immediate demands of the minister.

A good policy document is not by definition the one which at that moment is the most feasible and acceptable politically.
This relative distance from the short-term agenda does not exclude that the essay is clearly placed in a political context. In contrast to the expert advice, such means as ‘slick’ argumentation are widely used in an essay. However, in contrast to political advocacy, these means form a balance with the requirement for soundness based on a certain ‘civil servant’s responsibility.’

The main feature of an essay is that it does not need to be ‘immediately useful’:

A policy product can contribute a lot in the steering of thought formation in people high up at the department and the minister. It does not need to lead right away to specific results . . . It could be also that you do in fact have a specific solution for a given problem, but that it is important at a certain time to [let] reflection take place.

Few shared statements of the four patterns. The factors have a low correlation and present indeed quite different views. There are only five ‘shared’ opinions for all four types. First, all respondents agree that power issues are given and should be just accepted in policy development. Also everyone agrees that financial, juridical and communication aspects should be taken into account and that time lines should be specified.

There are also two statements that could be interpreted more as socially desirable answers than as genuine consensus. For instance, everyone unanimously rejects the idea that a good and useful policy document could be the result of a lucky coincidence:

In fact this means that policy making is not a profession, but just sheer luck.

Still, some say that they do have similar experiences:

Partly true, it is not complete nonsense. If the department leaders say that it is a good piece, it might have been garbage a week ago and become garbage again a week later. This is how I experience it, at least.

Similarly, all respondents quite eagerly refute the idea that a policy document is good when it enhances the unit’s self-interest. However, in other parts of the interview, the contrary is claimed:

Most civil servants are, in my opinion, quite limited within the walls of their unit, sometimes also by the unit’s self-interest which receives more attention than usual.

The conclusion is that the consensus items are partly socially desirable responses and partly self-evident statements. The consensus-statements do not indicate any systematic or shared basic attitude.
Four Types, One Typology

The four groups of respondents employ different patterns of criteria for judging policy documents, because they are based on an underlying idea about the basis function of this document. These different documents could be placed around two dimensions.

The first dimension pertains to the extent to which a document is oriented towards a decision or towards design. A document is more decision oriented when its content directly serves the process of political decision making or of political decision makers. A policy document is design oriented when the content is defined by analyses and/or visions of policy workers on the policy problems themselves.

The second dimension is the extent to which the policy document employs sound or ‘slick’ argumentation. In other words, this is the difference between intellectually convincing and seductive arguments. Taking into account the characteristic features of an audience, an argumentation strategy is defined and elaborated by using all kinds of rhetorical techniques.

In terms of these two dominant dimensions, the analytic report is solution oriented with an argumentation as sound as possible. The political advocacy is also solution oriented, but employs plenty of ‘slick’ argumentation. The expert advice is an attempt to produce a clear policy design through sound argumentation. The policy essay is policy design in a somewhat personal manner—interpretive and reflective, in which both types of argumentation play a role.

FIGURE 3.2
Clusters of Quality Standards
Discussion

In this section, we will first discuss the research findings on self-images, then those on quality criteria. Finally, we explore possible links between the two studies.

Uncertainties of the Political and Parliamentary Arena

When we compare the types of policy workers’ professional self-images we found in ‘our’ department to earlier studies, there are two missing: the ‘issue activist’ of Durning and Osuna (1994:645–646) and the ‘networker’ of Hartman and Tops (1987). Both the ‘issue activist’ and the ‘networker’ recognize the parliamentary-political arena and the whole policy network at its full range as important. Obviously, next to the primacy of parliamentary politics, there is something like the need to be in touch with society.

One possible explanation for the non-occurrence of the issue activist is the senior position of most of our respondents. They just could not afford to be absorbed into one ‘big’ issue only (Noordegraaf, 2000:235). Their orientation is a ministerial one: s/he is the one who ultimately weighs alternative policy options, her/his attention allocation determines their priorities. The ‘ministerial responsibility is first’ interpretation of the primacy of politics definitely affects how policy workers perform their jobs. According to one respondent, obviously at ‘our’ department, people are ambivalent about the way a civil servant should operate in the classic triangle of parliament-cabinet-department:

[although you could only produce quality work if you take completely into account the political dimensions] there are signs of fear of civil servants to be involved in political decision making processes . . . For instance, you could get the ‘death penalty’ at the department for contacts with parliament.

Next to the classic triangle, a network consists of all kinds of intermediary and field organizations, single-issue movements, specialized advisory bodies and (administrative) judges, media, academics and commentators, interest groups and involved professional groups and target groups. To strengthen the primacy of parliamentary politics at the expense of the primacy of contact with society means to deny the complexity of policy issues and policy networks.

Lack of Clear Professional Criteria

The research outcomes demonstrate a lack of shared professional crite-
ria. The statement, "If other analysts think it's a good piece of intellectual work, then it is good." [in the Dutch version—my colleagues], enjoys little appreciation:

[the statement] suggests in its extreme form that all policy analysts have the same view on policy work and this is absolutely not the case!

Remarkably, Durning and Osuna report the same professional uncertainty about American analysts, although US analysts do have a shared academic background at different schools of public policy analysis, in contrast to our respondents. In general, our research invokes an impression of professional uncertainty among policy workers in the civil service. They react in quite diverse ways to the many political 'cross-pressures' of their daily work.

Legitimacy of the Patterns of Quality Criteria

Professional uncertainty shows up even more in questions about the legitimacy of the four types of quality criteria. Especially respondents who adhere to criteria typical for a political advocacy, are quite aware of a conflict between political and analytical standards. For example, a comment on the question about the use of 'joker' alternatives:

Sometimes it may be necessary for political reasons, to increase the persuasive power of the document, indeed to place something absurd next to the promoted alternative. Although, of course, from the viewpoint of a civil servant and professional, I would not attempt such a thing. But if my minister chooses that, very explicitly, I would contribute.

We consider this a very significant statement about the gap between professional self-image as attitude and actual behavior as 'author' of a policy document.

This type of conflict is probably at the core of a lot of confusion about criteria for good policy documents. Obviously through experience, most senior civil servants have quite consistent views. On the contrary, junior respondents have difficulties fitting any pattern at all and often cannot name any central organizing theme for their choices.

There is also a senior respondent who does not fit the patterns, but this is rather due to well-exercised contingency thinking. At every statement, the respondent recalled circumstances, which would make it either applicable or irrelevant. In his view, all criteria and patterns would be legitimate as a whole, depending of the specific political and organizational context, and the place and function of a document in the policy making process. In any case, con-
fllicts of criteria-sets are weighed on a case-by-case basis.

We focus on this one respondent, because he demonstrates something unique. All other respondents chose one *implicit* dominant function of a policy document as an organizing tool for sorting (contradictory) criteria. In this sense, practice does not differ substantially from the literature.

**Criteria for Specific Policy Documents**

In an attempt to get a deeper insight in these criteria, we asked respondents to connect specific criteria to selected policy documents. At this level, we simply could not find any consistent pattern. When asked about their opinion about a document, the seniors replied mostly with 'stories' about its creation. Though the respondents apparently did work with the implicit basic types, they did not explicitly and systematically apply the criteria to the given 'real' policy document.

This professional uncertainty about the quality of policy-analytic work is actively stimulated by the department's political apex. Jo Ritzen, head of the ministry at the time of this research, states explicitly:

> On policy notes the minister quite clearly marks support for the civil servants ('excellent,' 'good work' is written on them). The minister knows that denigrating remarks on a policy document (Jacques Wallage once wrote: 'My bag is not a garbage can' and I once commented on a draft speech: 'This was written with a fork') have a deep and lasting impact. Civil servants working on such documents have to fight hard to regain lost respect among their colleagues.” (Ritzen, 1998:70)

The general picture emerging is that of civil servants who, due to confusion or mutual disagreement on criteria, judge quality on a case-by-case basis, using undiscussed, let alone agreed upon criteria. This situation is aggravated by the political leadership, that openly displays appreciation and disapproval, but only on an ex post aggregate level which makes policy workers second-guess the precise criteria used. All the more so, as they were eager to point out, what was 'excellent work' yesterday might very well turn out an 'F' tomorrow.

Among senior civil servants, the price for dealing with this uncertainty is rigidity. Juniors are left with considerable uncertainty about quality standards for their work, which could be only overcome through a trial- and-error process. Finally, this leads to communication problems between civil servants and political commissioners.

**Links Between Professional Self-images and Quality Criteria.**

Our most important finding here is that the common-sense hypothesis of
one-to-one correspondence of policy workers’ professional self-image types and types of quality criteria was not confirmed. The quality criteria for a policy advocacy paper were not necessarily adhered to or propagated by the advocate type of policy worker; nor would policy philosophers necessarily favor the essay over all other quality criteria.

Apparently, professional self-image types have a solid basis in a shared system of beliefs and judgments; and represent stable attitudes of policy workers towards the political-administrative environment. It is telling that this applies to both senior and younger policy workers. This finding clearly confirms Meltzner’s view that junior policy workers are not necessarily ‘baby analysts,’ i.e. they are not all expert advisers—‘technicians’—that have not yet been housebroken in the ways of politics and bureaucracy (Meltzner, 1976:18).

However, our findings on types of quality criteria show a strikingly different picture. Quality criteria inevitably are blurred, fuzzy and even contradictory. Consensus on quality criteria is limited to bureaucratic platitudes (“policy documents should pay attention to legal, budgetary and communicative aspects of policy,” “policy documents should be delivered timely”) and the token denial of bureau-political truths (“policy documents mostly reflect divisional interests”). This uncertainty and fuzziness appear to be the result of direct political exposure. Obviously, policy workers’ relatively stable professional self-images do not translate into an equally stable set of quality standards. This maybe due to the fact that in the policy-analytic profession writing policy documents is the most visible, but also the most politically vulnerable activity (Hoppe, 1983:226).

In a very real sense, the policy worker’s professionalism in preparing policy documents remains invisible and ephemeral to the politicians. Only when the visible and tangible end product, the policy document, is put in their bags as ‘homework,’ the quality of the product, as judged by functional and political superiors, becomes clear to policy workers themselves. ‘Peer review’ simply does not exist in the world of policy workers employed in bureaucratic organizations under political supervision. Small wonder that professionally agreed upon quality standards hardly can be said to exist. Perhaps the most that can be attained is four clusters of quality standards, second-guessed after the fact by experienced policy workers in touch with political supervisors, and pro-actively applied to policy documents on a case-by-case basis.

**Potential Practical Implications**

What implications do our findings have for managing policy formulation processes? What do they mean for teaching policy analysis and design in universities and other institutes for higher education? Much depends on whether
we interpret our findings as confusion or as requisite variety.

What happens if two or more of the professional types interact in one or more policy formulation processes on a routine basis? Might it be that policy workers speak only different ‘dialects,’ but understand each other quite well in terms of an overall policy workers’ professional language? Even though we do not know the exact answers to these questions, the implications for policy formulation process management appear relatively straightforward.

Most policy formulation, from an organizational point of view, is shaped as a special project. Project leadership and management demand the qualities of policy work of ‘process directors,’ i.e. a work attitude favorable to directing, managing and monitoring progress in the workflow for producing a particular policy document. In directing this process, timeliness and political acceptability are more important than design quality \(\textit{per se}.\) Also in departmental policy formulation, it is standard practice to appoint one central author or ‘writer’ (‘penvoorder’), who is responsible for the production and composition of the final policy document (and derived tasks like archiving, internal and external information management, etcetera). Here you need a ‘neo-weberian’ type of policy worker with highly developed writing and reporting sensitivities, and adhering to high quality standards of transparent argumentation; more or less as a countervailing power to the pragmatism and manipulative drive of the good process director. To the extent that most policy analyses and designs require multidisciplinary expertise, the policy formulation team usually is composed of several ‘\textit{expert advisers}.’

In cases where political expediency requires a speeded-up process of policy design and a ‘tough’ approach to policy adoption, the ‘\textit{policy advocate}’ type of policy worker appears the right choice. Whereas one had better choose the ‘\textit{policy philosopher}’ type in controversial issues, in which problem finding and structuration, choice of mega-policy guidelines, and a more cautious approach to policy adoption appear politically prudent. In cases when feasibility testing or an interactive approach to policy formulation is of crucial importance, you may need the ‘policy networker’ who can successfully operate as ‘spider in the web’ of connections between stakeholders, implementers and target groups. (Hoppe et al., 1998:49–51).

This contingency view, which stresses the old adage of “the right man, on the right place, at the right time,” neatly sums up the management implications. But more difficult questions remain. Is it always feasible to plug a particular type of policy worker into a particular stage of the policy formulation process, only to be removed later when his analytic style appears to be less fruitful from a process point of view? How rigid are the stable types of professional images, in the sense of being open to and communicable for other perspectives? And how about long-term super- and subordinate relationships
between the types? We would need research into the sequencing of types of policy work during the career of policy workers to find out if there are any plausible path-dependent patterns here.

What are the implications for training policy professionals? One thing appears obvious: training policy workers (like in Europe) as field-specific, or (like in the American schools of policy analysis) decision-method experts will no longer do. In the former case, training is limited to expert advisers; in the latter, to quantitatively oriented (biased) neo-weberians. But can one train someone to become a policy philosopher, or process director? In Dutch public administration schools policy-directed courses pay more and more attention to network theories and corresponding skills of network management. Do we want to train policy advocates? Or would this mean training ‘spin doctors’ and other types of post-modern Machiavellists? Can policy workers be trained to play all roles? Or maybe more radically, which roles can be taught at all?

Concerning the four clusters of quality criteria, practical implications are more difficult to discern. Perhaps, drawing up a checklist of all possible quality criteria is useful in opening up the topic for explicit discussions (Hoppe et al., 1998:47–48). During a policy formulation process, policy workers and their supervisors might regularly engage in discussions or negotiations about appropriate criteria. Among policy workers rigid adherence to one or another set of quality criteria might sooner or later give way to a contingency approach to quality criteria. We doubt, however, if politicians would be willing to engage in such processes. As far as training goes, one should certainly confront students with different types of analytic texts that score differently on the four quality criteria sets. The least that one may expect from a well-trained policy analyst is that s/he can tell the different types of policy documents. Whether or not we could train future analysts to actually write different types of documents could be tested.

Governance and the Future of Policy Work

Prospects for the expansion of policy work in the Netherlands are mixed. In an age of cut-backs on the number of civil servants, the need for sound policy analysis and evaluation of policy impacts remains. Partially, this need manifests itself in outsourcing of policy functions by government organizations to market-based professional policy research and advisory organizations. An example is the Department of Education, Culture & Science after the period in which we studied it. We observe a steady loss of policy analysis and design skills for high- and medium-level policy issues. Between 1997 and
2004, as part of a broader drive for administrative reforms according to the New Public Management gospel, the department implemented a policy shift to privatization and arm’s length governance of higher education in the Netherlands. Fully attuned to the political beliefs of their minister, Mr. Jo Ritzen, an educational economist, designing a system of financial rewards and penalties and a system of quality assessment for higher education institutes, became the only policy-analytic tasks in the department. Thus, the rich scope of policy-analytic expertise present at the department was dismantled; mainly financial expert advisers were kept as civil servants; quality assessment was left to the the Association of Cooperating Dutch Universities (VSNU). For other policy-analytic jobs the department increasingly turned to outsourcing and hiring policy expertise from commercial consultants. Sometimes this involved the same people that were once employed as civil servants by the department itself. Thus the department was drawn into the strong trend towards the commodification, commercialization and contractualization of (policy) expertise that beset the entire government in the late nineties of last century (Halffman and Hoppe, 2005).

At the national departmental level, then, there is hardly any growth in the number of jobs for policy analysts and evaluators. But it looks like regional and local governments are a growth market. For decentralization policies to be successful, local governments need to enlarge and enhance their policy analytic and evaluative capacities. In order to anticipate and deal with local financial implications of decentralized issues, in order to scan their environments for promising partnerships with business, intermediary organizations, and frequently even Brussels, local and regional governments simply need better policy analytic and evaluative know-how. However, there are some other developments to take into account. These crystallize in the dialectical dynamics of the turn towards governance and its counterpart, the drive for reasserting the primacy of politics.

The conceptual move from ‘government’ to ‘governance’ is a telling sign of structural changes in the societal and political environment of public policymakers. Public policy can no longer be accurately described as a government-focused activity, aiming at the regulation of civil society and markets by bureaucratic public organizations that make policies and manage policy programs in close interaction with, but in sharply defined task differentiation from and accountability to elected politicians. ‘Governance’ is bringing about “concerted action across institutional boundaries on behalf of public purpose” (O’Toole, 2000: 278). It is about inter-jurisdictional coordination (including deliberate non-intervention and self-regulation) between government, market-based, non-governmental, not-for-profit and mixed types of organizations in all kinds of network configurations.

In such conditions, public policymaking is affected on two counts. First,
traditional forms of political representation run out of steam. The number of politically relevant policy actors increases. So do the corresponding scope and legitimacy of variety and pluralism in worldviews, belief systems, interpretive frames, and interests that should be taken into account in policy analysis, design and evaluation. Second, in the age of the welfare and administrative state, policy analysis was institutionalized as the dominant mode of analytic, instrumental and substantive rationality, a unitary rational actor perspective applied to affairs of state. In Wildavsky’s famous phrase, policy analysis could realistically be conceived as “speaking truth to power.” Under conditions of governance networks in a risk society, these once dominant rationality types are complemented, if not replaced, by more communicative and procedural types of rationality (Hoppe, 1999; 2002). The policy analyst’s focus is no longer on getting policy advice ‘right’ on the basis of ‘facts’ for ‘the minister.’ S/he is no longer by definition an expert adviser or neo-weberian type of policy worker.

Nowadays, the policy analyst’s task is to bring together in extended and complex networks both governmental policymakers, stakeholders in markets, knowledge producers, relevant nongovernmental organizations, and groups that are somehow representative for target groups or citizen movements. The policy analyst’s problem is not so much ‘speaking truths to powers’ (Radin, 2000:51), as trying to ‘make sense together’ (Hoppe, 1999), by inducing learning dialogues between all those different types of policy actors and those who are still endowed with legitimate public power to proclaim and implement official policy under accountability to democratically elected legislative bodies. Therefore, policy worker types like process managers, brokers, policy philosophers, and mediators become more visible.

This shift in focus of policy analysis in response to structural changes in the relevant environment for professional performance is visible in academic textbooks. Under a spade of new labels, like “the argumentative turn,” “narrative policy analysis,” “interpretive policy analysis,” “deliberative policy analysis,” “frame-reflective/critical analysis,” “the post-positivist turn” and many more, the shift from analycentric, instrumental rationality to a more fallible, dialogical and procedural type of rationality has been announced, explained and legitimated (Hoppe, 1999; Fischer, 2003). Undoubtedly, all this has contributed to a better grasp of the diverse forms of policy analysis in demand in the real world. But equally so, is has not furthered policy analysis as a professional project. At least, so far.

To be successfully disseminated and practiced, the newer forms of policy analysis need to move from description to prescription and appropriate forms of codification. Authors who write about and advocate them, correctly point out that it is artificial and misleading to strip ex post reflection on action from the context-bound and power-laden reflection in action: “The practical con-
text of an analytic project is not only likely to affect its outcome and impact but also to affect the project itself. The context enters the analysis, so to speak. . . . (T)he requirement to act on the results of the analysis obviously implies the need to take seriously into account the particularities of the practices of the actors that it seeks to address. Methodical prescriptions therefore may lose their merit, if not their potential effectiveness in a power-laden action context (Loeber, 2004: 59).”

Perhaps this lack of prescriptive and methodical how-to-do-it (and how-to-teach-it) qualities of the newer modes of policy analysis is why APPAM, the US-based major professional association for policy analysts, is reluctant to grant them “a place at the table” (Rothenburg Pack, 1999). By denying the reality and needs of traditional political and administrative clients, as well as those of newer types of clients like for example non-governmental organizations and citizen groups, this response exacerbates the ‘disconnect’ between professional and academic training for policy analysis and the actual policy work required ‘out there’ (cf. Colebatch and Radin, in this book). But equally, proponents of the newer modes of policy analysis harm their own cause by refusing to engage in serious efforts at moving the newer modes of policy analysis from description and ex post analyses to prescription. After all, they would not want to leave the dissemination of argumentative, deliberative or participatory modes of policy analysis to nontransparent processes of imitation, mystery and mastery. They correctly reject detailed, but context-free cookbook-like recipes easily taught to aspiring professionals; but they should engage in more systematic reflection on experiences that discusses precisely the ways in which underlying overall argumentative, deliberative and participatory strategies get translated into situation-bound policy-analytic practices. This should be done in conjunction with the empirically based type of contingency thinking proposed in this paper (Hisschemöller et al., 2001, esp. chapters 3 and 19; Mayer et al., 2002; 2004; Joss and Bellucci, 2002; Loeber, 2004).

In dialectical fashion, the turn to governance has elicited active resistance from political parties and elected politicians: a renewed drive for the primacy of politics. In Europe, and in the Netherlands too, political parties experience a dramatic loss of active membership. Yet, they are, and desire to maintain their position as, the major venue for holding political office in central positions of power. Hence a renewed drive for the primacy of politics, as defensive reflex against too much stakeholder or citizen involvement in (interactive, more participatory or deliberative, styles of) public policymaking; but also against the “fourth power” of bureaucracy (Ritzen, 1998:76–81) and the “fifth power” of expert advisory bodies (Halffman & Hoppe, 2005). It is very clear that political parties and elected politicians, both in the legislative and execu-
tive branches of government, do not have an interest in advancing the professional status of civil servants generally, and policy analysts more particularly. After all, they are not wrong in constructing policy analysis and design as an effort to make their own core business, prudence or political judgment, more systematic and methodical (Hoppe, 1983; Torgerson, 1986; Loeber, 2004). In their views, the unique feature of the civil servant as professional is political loyalty in elaborating and selling major political guidelines in public policy (Ritzen, 1998:69); and this political loyalty should trump the analysts’ professional conscience (for US examples, see Williams, 2002).

Given the tendency to organize policy work and employ policy analysts in multi-professional bureaucratic organizations (Abbott, 1988) under a generalist type of management that frequently rotates from one policy area to the next; given the principal-agent logic of distrust that dominates the outsourcing practices of policy-analytic expertise to commercial policy consultancy organizations; given the genuine difficulties in the codification of newer modes of policy analysis; and given the reluctance, even active resistance, of politicians to professionalize policy work as essentially producing political judgments, we deem chances for further advances in the professionalization of policy analysis in the Dutch system of governance as mixed (at best) or even bleak (at worst).

Notes

1. In the present drive for more independent, partially privatized knowledge institutes, the CBS was renamed “Statistics Holland.”

2. The CPB’s name, at least in English (in Dutch it has remained CPB because the organization is mentioned by that acronym in the law), has been changed to Center for Economic Policy Analysis.

3. Detailed research reports, including the Qsort statements and statistical appendices, can be found in Jeliazkova & Hoppe, 1996, and Hoppe & Jeliazkova, 2004.

4. Obviously, some information is “lost in translation,” i.e. the statements may have received different connotations in adjusting them for a Dutch audience. The most significant adjustment has been using the term ‘beleidsambtenaar’ (policy functionary) instead of the American ‘policy analyst.’ The word ‘client’ has been also translated with a broader Dutch term—‘opdrachtgever.’ It is not our intention here to go into a finer linguistic analysis, though some speculation might be possible on the degree to which translation has contributed to different results from the American and the Dutch study. Wherever relevant throughout the text, reference is made to differences in wording.

5. Throughout the text, we use interchangeably the terms ‘civil servant’ and ‘policy analyst’ as synonyms of the Dutch ‘beleidsambtenaar,’ or ‘policy functionary,’ also in
the translation of the interview excerpts.

6. Except for the policy philosophers, which reject the sentence on totally different grounds.

7. For a more detailed account, including statistical appendices, the reader is referred to Jeliakovka & Hoppe, 1997, and Hoppe & Jeliakovka, 2004.

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