



# RESEARCH PAPERS

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*Institut for Samfundsvidenskab og Erhvervsøkonomi*

**Research Paper no.7/99**

**Roles in transition!**

**Politicians and administrators**

**between hierarchy and network**

**Helle Sundgaard Andersen, Lotte Jensen, Birgit  
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**Research Papers from the Department of Social Sciences, Roskilde University, Denmark.**

**Working paper series**

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**Abstract:**

What does it mean to be a politician or an administrator in contemporary Denmark? The conditions under which these two central categories of actors operate within the political system have changed considerably in recent years. Hence, processes of societal governance can less be characterized as hierarchical, centralized, top-down government, and more as horizontal network governance. The working paper presents the outline of a research project which aims to contribute to the accumulation of knowledge concerning the means by which administrators and politicians handle the conflicts that emerge as a result of the modification of these otherwise traditional roles.

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## **Roles in transition!**

### **Politicians and administrators between hierarchy and network**

**By Helle Sundgaard Andersen, Lotte Jensen, Birgit Jæger, Karina Sehested, Eva Sørensen, Roskilde University, Denmark**

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## 1. Introduction

There can hardly be any doubt that the roles of politicians and administrators in contemporary society are quite removed from the understanding of the roles that is associated with the ideals our democratic institutions are built upon.

Today's politicians assume their roles very differently than has previously been the case. Some function as a kind of ombudsman for the general population; others act as sector politicians who develop extensive insight into certain policy areas and carefully monitor the administration of these areas; others are generalists who exclusively take issue with the "big principles" that affect the political decision-making process. It is clear that regardless of which of these roles are chosen, it is impossible to live up to the expectations that lie in the electoral chain of command. That is that politicians make the authoritative decisions for society, where after they control the implementation of these decisions (Lundquist, 1975: 46).

Generally speaking, contemporary administrators play a much more independent role than the neutral, loyal and "implementing" role of the bureaucrat which the electoral chain of command implies. Some function as "procedure administrators," who consider their primary task to be the provision of the conditions under which local actors are allowed to obtain influence. Others are "value administrators," who - on the basis of their normatively founded objectives - exercise the degrees of freedom that exists in the political system to move public regulation in a certain direction. Finally, other administrators can be regarded as "profession administrators," who primarily draw on professional norms as the basis for their administrative efforts. These administrative roles are in disharmony with the traditional visions concerning the neutral, policy-implementing administrator.

The distance between the multiplicity of the concrete roles and the ideal roles draws our attention to the need to investigate what it actually means to be a politician or administrator.: What kind of problems should they solve? What realistic possibilities do they have to solve them? What kind of conception of their role does the means by which they approach their job refer to? The fundamental task for this research project is therefore to investigate:

**How are the roles of politicians and administrators in the Danish public sector constructed and lived out at the dawn of the new millenium?**

The background for the project is a range of considerations concerning the various factors that may have contributed to the considerable distance that has emerged between ideal and actual role-related conduct.

## **2. From unambiguous to conflicting criteria for success concerning the regulation of society**

The research project is founded on an assumption that the criteria for success in thoughts about how societal governance are in a state of flux. Briefly stated, the success criteria which are related to the electoral chain of command are: creating societal unity, insuring top-down control and providing maintaining societal stability. These criteria are challenged by the emergence of alternative criteria for success that increasingly characterize contemporary society: room for difference, local autonomy, and a preparedness to rearrange and adapt.

In the 1970's and the beginning of the 1980's the public sector was not capable of fulfilling the significant, and steadily increasing, number of tasks related to regulation that were imposed upon it. There is talk of a wave of "governing failures" (Mayntz, 1993; Jessop, 1998), which led to a reckoning with modernity's faith in rationality and instrumentality among many social researchers and developers of organizations. Through the 1980's many simply lost faith in the notion that it is possible to develop forms of organizations that insure efficient top-down regulation (Lipsky, 1980; Hull & Hjern, 1987).

The result of this acknowledgement has been a gradual modification of the manner with which societal regulation is organized. This modification has proceeded along lines from "governmental regulation" towards "governance regulation" (Sharpf, 1994; Kooiman, 1993; Rhodes, 1996; Pedersen, 1994). Governmental regulation is organized according to principles related to the electoral chain of command, such as an emphasis on hierarchy, central management and rule regulation. The forms of organization that contrastingly characterize governance regulation are based on network, autonomy and problem solving.

This development has been commonly referred to by social scientists as a transition from governmental regulation to governance regulation. However, this is not our perception of the situation. It is more correct to say that the management of contemporary society is characterized by a need to relate to opposing criteria for success. "Good Government" has become a balance between inherently incompatible (Sørensen, 1998). The contemporary challenge to the political system involves the development of institutions that represent a balance between the objectives expressed in

both government and governance. Scharpf describes the regulatory situation as “networking in the shadow of hierarchy” (Scharpf, 1994).

This situation is observable in the development of public institutions in both North America and Western Europe, but the development manifests itself differently depending upon the historical and cultural differences in the public sector’s development in the individual national contexts. In the Danish context, this is seen in the internationalization (particularly in the development of the EU) and in the decentralization (to counties, municipalities and institutions) that has led to a pronounced distinction between the levels of the Danish political system. It is further evidenced by the growth of a multiplicity of grey-zone institutions that serve to blur the borders between the public and private sectors (Greve, 1998).

### **3. Politicians and administrators between government and governance**

This development makes it difficult to be a politician and administrator on the grounds that the role models that are related to the electoral chain of command have lost a great deal of their utility. For politicians this role model has been undermined because the tasks that the public sector now has authority over have become so complex and comprehensive. Politicians have a difficult time maintaining the necessary sense of perspective needed to make well-informed, well-considered and normatively founded decisions on behalf of society - not to mention the task of monitoring their implementation. For the administrators as well, the traditional role model provides little inspiration. This is owing to the following facts: firstly, the decentralization and autonomization of a large number of public institutions has led to a situation where it no longer makes sense to function as rule-implementing bureaucrats. Secondly, the expectation that the administration plays a very active and co-producing role in the political system has become increasingly comprehensive. This means that politicians and administrators are forced to develop their own individual approaches, which in practice enables them to prioritize between their tasks and strike a balance between opposing success criteria.

### **4. Mapping of coping strategies and meaning construction strategies**

The focus of this research project is the attempts of politicians and administrators to deal with the emergent tension between the roles of the past and the demands of the present. We place particular emphasis on searching for answers to the following questions:



- How do politicians and administrators deal with the tension between the traditional expectations of their roles and the tasks that they feel it is now their job to perform?
- Which role conceptions are related to the individual coping strategies?
- Can one identify fragments which might add to the emergence of new roles for politicians and administrators in public institutions that are based on “networking in the shadow of hierarchy,” and which are subject to opposing criteria for success?
- How do the coping strategies and attempts to construct new roles influence the political system’s efficiency and legitimacy?

Against this background, it is apparent that the project deals both with the roles’ content, the process and context in which they have come to be, as well as their consequences. However, before an analysis of this nature can proceed, further consideration concerning the concept of the “role” is required.

## 5. The concept of the role

Our approach to the institutionalization of new means of conducting democratic regulation between hierarchy and network revolves around the concept of meaning. A role represents the construction of a standardized form of action - of that which is done, the means by which it is done, and the actor who is responsible for the action in question.

The role has an internal and an external side

The *external side* is the socially institutionalized interpretation of a role’s content and its substance. The role is the basis for institutionalization. The sustainability of an institution depends upon the actors fulfilling their roles.

*“The institution, with its collection of ‘programmed actions’ is like an unwritten libretto for a drama. The realization of the drama depends upon living actors repeatedly performing their prescribed roles. Actors assume the role and realize the drama by representing it on a certain scene. Neither drama nor institution exist empirically removed from this repeated realization.”* (Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 94)

The institutional standardization of roles is reciprocal and does not merely deal with the actions, but also the actors in the institutions. In that light, it is the interaction of the actors that serves to establish the outside of their roles: what it means to assume a certain role, and therein what is expected of a person who assumes such a role. A battery of mechanisms sanctions the

expectations that are built into a role. At the one end of the scale lies the creation of the language through which reality is perceived - the language that is determinant for what is real and unreal and which thereby functions as a sorting mechanism as to which of the actors' thoughts and actions can be drawn into reality and named. At the other end lies disciplinary sanctions in the form of physical punishment or exclusion as a result of the failure to fulfill the expectations that are associated with a certain role.

The *internal side* is the personal interpretation of the means by which a role is understood. The extent and manner with which it is compatible with the personal biography, the space it occupies in the personal identity and the weight it has towards determining rationality according to which the individual acts.

The internal and external sides of the role hang together organically, but they are not congruent. It is the external role - the socially constructed linguistic objectivizations (everything from simple verbal designations to complex symbolizations of reality) - that gives the individual access to a framework of understanding in which she can perceive her role-related actions unclear meaning break up. It is on the stage where the other players are to be found and involved in playing their own roles that she can become visible as possessor of a role. In this situation, the objectivized meaning of the role serves to pre-structure the understanding that the individual has of herself and the manner with which she is to act in her role as e.g. head of a department, leader of a day-care center, member of a user board or minister. But irregardless that the role, perceived from within, arrives from elsewhere with a pre-structured frame of understanding, there are always certain degrees of freedom for interpretation and therefore to make a difference in action. We therefore work with the notion of role on three levels: Two, that deal with its outside (the formal role and the institutional role) and one that deals with its inside (the inner role):

1. The formal role, which is the written codex? For the possessor of the role, from which the institution draws its formal legitimacy. An example is that of the role of the politically neutral civil servant, which is performed '*sine ira et studio*' as a strictly professional role (Weber, 1971: 128).
2. The institutional role, which is the social interpretation of the actual daily working function, developed in the concrete organization. An example is the civil servant providing advice concerning policy where there is no formal codex, but where typified standards for the manner in which one is to fulfill the role have been developed within the organization.

An example of the latter is found in committee report no. 1354 concerning the relationship between politicians and civil servants:

*"The committee finds it to be of significance to emphasize that the Danish development has meant that there is a list of tasks that are performed by political appointees in the three described nations (Sweden, Norway and the*

*United Kingdom), which in Denmark are performed by the permanent civil service. This means that political tactics and technical advising are integrated, just as both advising and the completion of the minister's policy is administered by the civil service, which several of the interviewed ministers and civil servants referred to as an advantage. In the meantime, the linking of the political/tactical and the technical advising can lead to special situations in which there is a danger that Danish civil servants do not sufficiently protect their professional, or technical convictions in their advising of the ministers. However, Danish civil servants are very aware of this risk.” (Ministry of Finance, 1998: 216)*

3. The inner role, which is the individual person's construction and means of dealing with the role. This is where the personal conception of the role - the possibilities and limitations that it bears - and the manner with which one can act within the role on that basis. An example is the civil servant who deals with the relationship between the formal and the informal on the basis of personal experience and gravity:

*“My impression of the Schlüter period is that the amount of ideological political work increased. For example, one was made to write ministerial letters, ministerial speeches, op-eds. for the newspapers - constantly. I refused to do so. Of course I was so old and eccentric that I could get away with it. But the younger ones could not. They were constantly made to write things in the press and other places. In the old days one would have said that the minister could write those things himself, we can't have anything to do with it, it is a task for the party office.” (Juhl, 1997: 18)*

The analysis of roles can either be constructed from the outside, where the focus is on which role conceptions are institutionalized in an organization and in that sense appear as expectations for the individual actor, or from within, where the focus is on how the externally formulated expectations of a role are perceived, dealt with and reconstructed by the individual. The angle one chooses as the basis upon which to build is solely a matter of perspective. (Jensen, 1997: 59, f.)

The project aims at casting light on the relation between the three levels so that it becomes apparent how the roles are produced through the meaning laden action of actors in interaction, which simultaneously serves to both facilitate and limit this interaction.

The project's interest for the conception of roles necessitates a certain amount of consideration concerning that which is meant with the term “conceptions.”

## 6. About conceptions

The project focuses on actors' development of their *conceptions* concerning a political system of regulation - about their own role and those of the other actors in it. The relationship between the actors and the world around them is an ongoing, interactive exchange relationship. (Bech Jørgensen, 1988: 69; Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 66; Giddens, 1984: 25). "*Asking which comes first or which should be given causal priority is a nonstarter.*" (Thompson et al. 1990: 21).

Employing the actors' conceptions as the project's point of departure is a matter of analytical perspective, which prioritizes a single stage in this ongoing process: the human appropriation of meaning to one's self, one's actions and one's surroundings. The perspective can be shifted to an "external" perspective. If we are to adopt a participatory perspective towards understanding an occurrence, it is then seen as an action with basis in the participants' more or less conscious conceptions concerning it. If we are to adopt a spectator perspective on the same occurrence, the subjective content of meaning is forced into the background. Occurrences perceived internally become actions that are anchored in an actor. Actions perceived externally become actions without connection to an actor, or occurrences where the actor's effect is insignificant, despite the fact that he considers himself to be the principal agent (Giddens, 1993: 89). The conceptions that man has concerning the world around him serves to structure his actions in relation to it. Simultaneously, the conceptions are produced in it. These conceptions are then interesting and central on the grounds that they serve to predispose action without mechanically dictating it. Max Weber expresses this rather poetically:

*"Interests (material and ideal), not: ideas rule the action of mankind. But the images of the world that emerge via ideas are like track signals that very often decide the tracks in which the interests' dynamic serve to influence action."* (Quoted from Nørager, 1989: 61)

### 6.1. Conceptions: definition of the term

Conceptions are not ideals in the sense of the actor's views concerning an ideal world. Nor are conceptions to be considered as objective descriptions of a phenomenon. The investigation of conceptions is neither normative nor objective. That which is of interest is the involved actors' images of the system they belong to, the role they themselves have in relation to it and the relevance that it has for them.

Conceptions are "in family" with a number of other terms within the social sciences: Consciousness concerning, perceptions of (Almond & Verba, 1989: chap. 2 and 3), ideas (Nørager, 1989), values, knowledge

(Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 15), Weltanschauung (Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 27), common sense (Giddens, 1993: 96; 121; Bech Jørgensen, 1988: 69), interpretation and meaning (March & Olsen, 1989: 39), belief (Douglas, 1982: 199). This plethora of terms refer to all individually and collectively images of the world that are taken for granted. Conceptions are to be understood in this project *partly as individual and partly as collective cognitive and normative images of reality concerning a given area*. The project focuses on conceptions concerning roles: partly inner individual *conceptions* concerning the roles of the politician and administrator and partly the collective outer conception concerning the roles in question.

The term ‘conception’ builds on Berger and Luckmann’s sociology of knowledge and the concept of *knowledge*. Our reasons for limiting ourselves from dealing with the concept of knowledge are their implications for objectivity, an idea about certain information or knowledge. Berger & Luckmann tackle this problem by writing “knowledge” in quotation marks to indicate that this is not in reference to objective certainties, but rather about a socially constructed agreement about what is real and right (Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 13). We use *conceptions* in order to be able to avoid these objective connotations. The term conception precisely implies that the perceived is actually seen from a certain position or from within a certain group; regardless that the same seen from another position or from within another group is interpreted differently or disregarded completely. Berger & Luckmann express the basis of the sociology of knowledge in the following:

*“That which is real for a Tibetan monk is not necessarily real for an American businessman. The criminal’s knowledge deviates from that of criminology.”*  
(Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 15)

On the level of the *individual*, the conceptions are the individual actor’s answer to the questions: What is the system that you are a part of and what is your relation to it? These conceptions are a part of the individual’s comprehensive self-understanding - a part of his efforts to interpret his own life and the context of his life as meaningful (Bech Jørgensen, 1988: 77). On the level of the collective, the conceptions are the accepted images of a role’s consequences within a given group - a group norm. The intersubjective conceptions appear as group norms in interviews - reifications - that the interviewed person can hold forth and refer to. The individual and collective conceptions are not necessarily the same. The degree of similarity is indicative of the strength of the group norm within the group in question. The depth of the group norm is the extent that this particular group norm has in the individual person’s everyday life.

## 6.2. The conceptions' significance and status

The basis for the project is that people are considered to be active, interpreting beings that operate in a social context. Man is constantly seeking to create a meaningful understanding of his life in order to be capable to navigate within it (March & Olsen, 1989: 41; Bech Jørgensen, 1988: 74; Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 69f). The conception is a map that is employed for navigation when one is acting – a map that one is constantly correcting and adjusting according to one's experiences.

This does not mean that one can provide an exhaustive description of one's impulse to act on the basis of consultation with one's conceptions about oneself and one's actions. Flyvbjerg (1991, I, chap. 2), with basis in a learning model from Dreyfus & Dreyfus, seeks to demonstrate that the majority of human activity is regulated by intuition and experience which cannot be articulated. Action is conducted on the basis of spontaneous interpretations and intuitive approximations (Flyvbjerg, 1991: I, 30).

The basis of the project, however, is that human activity cannot be understood isolated from man's conceptions of himself and the world around him. We, as researchers, can come some distance towards understanding the investigated individual's universe of meaning. Nevertheless we shall never try to convince ourselves that we will ever be capable of getting to the bottom of things. Borum et al. express this well:

*“Anyone who has attempted to get to know everything about his spouse within a marriage is forced to admit that a single life is not sufficient to research merely one single individual's universe. Anyone who has attempted the art of placing oneself in another person's situation and imagining oneself their pattern of thought becomes aware that this necessitates that one has lived a life as this other person.”* (Borum et al. 1992: 205)

Giddens' distinction between three categories of consciousness, namely discursive consciousness, practical consciousness and unconscious motives/cognition (Giddens 1984: 7), can contribute to an explanation of the project's analytical level of ambition. These distinctions are indicative of a descending degree of articulation and reflexive understanding of the motives and actions of the actor. For Giddens the point is that the very skeleton between the levels first and foremost is based on experience and socialization. The extent to which one is conscious of - and can speak about - one's experiences and actions varies from person to person. The extent to which one is able to attain insight into the human impulse to act in the course of the interview therefore varies according to the interviewed person's presentation of herself.

In a project such as this, which bases itself on interviews with persons, the element from the “map of activity” that can be discursively expressed will be dominant. When speaking with people, one receives their conscious – and in some instances deliberate – perceptions of themselves and the world around them. But it is not impossible to get people to reflect on their practical consciousness and in that manner involve a greater part of the rationale for their action in the interview and the analysis. The interviews can be quite time consuming and assume the form of conversations more than answers to a series of questions on the basis of an interview guide. Regarding questions as to how everyday situations are approached in relation to the themes and investigatory problems that we are investigating, the interview persons regularly articulated contexts and things as they have done thousands of times previously, though perhaps not quite in the same terms, for as they say, there has never been anyone who has inquired in this manner in the past (Jensen, 1997).

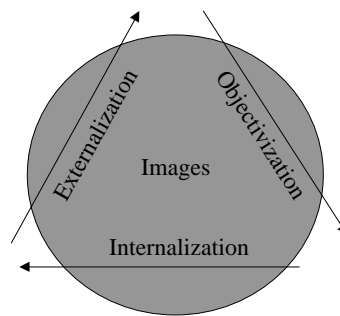
The conception’s status in an analysis is such that it is only indicative of a part – albeit a central part – of the entire impulse behind the individual’s action. In other words, the actors’ conceptions of the roles of the politician and administrator serves to guide their actions; but it does not mean that one can explain every action on the basis of these conceptions. The central role of the conceptions builds on Berger & Luckmann’s triangular model of the relationship between man and society:

- Society is a man-made product.
- Society is an objective reality.
- Man is a social product.

Berger & Luckmann use the term *externalization* as the label for the processes through which man creates the world around him via interpretation and action. They refer to the processes through which the man-made processes and products come to assume the status of belonging to reality as *objectivization*. The processes through which the objectivized reality is acquired by the actors are referred to as *internalization* (Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 79). These conceptions are the tools we employ in our understanding of ourselves and our surroundings, and serve as the basis for our action:

*“Knowledge is the crankshaft in society’s fundamental dialectic. It programs the channels through which externalization provides us with the objective world. It objectivizes this world through language and the cognitive apparatus that is based on language, in other words, it creates order by making the world into objects that can be considered as real. In the process of socialization it is internalized again as an objective, valid truth. Knowledge concerning society is therefore realization in both sense of the word – as an understanding of the objectivized social reality and as a conduit for the continued exposure to that reality.”* (Berger & Luckmann, 1966: 85).

The integration of the conceptions in the societal dynamic can be drawn as such:



The conceptions are integrated parts of society's dynamic and in that sense not an entity that can be considered in isolation from society or from people and their actions. Conceptions do not temporally precede actions. Conceptions about actions are acquired in the action itself. One appears to oneself and others as acting when one begins to act. The conceptions that come forth in the interviews are always merely an incision in the ongoing process of acting and experience.

The investigation of *conceptions* is based on a number of premises:

- That conceptions about the world serve to guide - but not determine - actions within the world.
- That the impulse to act is to a certain degree accessible for the actor via self-reflection or dialogue and can therefore be verbalized and expressed via conceptions.
- That the researcher, via inquiry concerning the interviewed person's everyday life, can access the interviewed person's impulses to act via the conceptions.

## 7. The project's points of focus

Obviously it is not possible to uncover all aspects of the strategies by which politicians and administrators construct and assume their roles. We have therefore



chosen four points to focus on, which to a particular degree have come into the center as a result of developments in society.

### **7.1. Focus point A:**

**How do politicians and administrators construct and deal with the division of labor amongst themselves and which perspectives does this give for the establishment of a new form of division of labor between the two roles?**

The public administration (and a good deal of the private) has traditionally been built up according to bureaucratic principles. The understanding that the administration ought to function as a bureaucracy is also the point of departure for the electoral chain of command:

*“The ideal bureaucrat ought to be professional, impartial, objective and conscientious. In the event that he receives an order that he disagrees with he is obligated to make his views known to his superior. In the event that his superior nevertheless maintains his view it is expected that the civil servant fulfill the order to the best of his ability. The bureaucratic ethic dictates that obligation to obey is ranked highest. The bureaucrat’s position ought to be based on a professional evaluation and be entirely independent of personal sympathies and negative sentiments.” (Olsen, 1978: 26).*

This view is central both in bureaucracy theory and in the classic administration theory. It assumes a clear line of division between administration and politics. The politicians dictate the dominant goals while the bureaucrats loyally and neutrally implement these goals according to evaluations pertaining to administration – evaluations concerning legality and which means that best bring about the desired goals. This division of labor is fundamental for government regulation.

It has long been clear that this division can be difficult to maintain in practice. But one thing is certain – it has not become easier. The increased decentralization, delegation, deregulation, user influence, contracting out, etc. that is all a part of the movement towards governance regulation contributes to a situation in which it becomes difficult to identify clear chains of command, hierarchy, and as concerns regulation from top to bottom, the division of labor between politicians and administrators. The question here is, which perspectives does this development raise for the organization of the relationship between politicians and administrators? How do politicians and administrators grasp this challenge and what kind of division of labor is constructed in the daily practice?

Numerous Scandinavian investigations support the claim that a shift has occurred in relation to the division of labor between politicians and administrators. Four investigations can be highlighted. Firstly, a Swedish

investigation (Blom, 1994) concerning municipal leadership, which concluded that the leaders of the municipal administration have received increasing influence in the sphere of the political at the expense of the lay politicians' influence. Secondly, a Danish investigation of the role of the chief executive of the municipal authority in the sphere of the political (Hansen, 1995). A third investigation deals with the role of the municipal politician in Sweden, Norway and Denmark, including the relationship to the administration. This investigation concludes:

*"In summary we can ascertain that the politicians are generally in a subordinate relationship to the civil servant. The leading civil servants would seem to be at the center of power."* (Nilsson, 1996: 26)

Finally, Stig Montin has conducted an investigation concerning public leadership and the role of the politician. He concludes: "Putting things on edge, one can say that the politicians discuss questions pertaining to organization and regulation while the civil servants take care of the policy." (Montin, 1996: 21).

The investigations referred to above deal primarily with the manner with which the role of the administrator has been expanded. Of course this also has indirect implications for the direction in which the role of the politician has developed. It becomes clear that the borders for the traditional division of labor between politics and administration have shifted. Not that this tendency is without exception – to the contrary. In the Danish context one can actually observe two fundamentally opposed tendencies:

- The erasing of the difference between politics and administration via 'political civil servants,'
- The maintenance of a clear line of division between politics and administration via, among other things, the concept of New Public Management.

At the same time there are conflicting efforts which in effect work towards the integration of politics and administration on the one side, and the separation of the two on the other. This point of focus is built up around these two apparently conflicting tendencies.

### **7.1.1. The tendency towards political civil servants**

The administration of the Danish state distinguishes itself from that of other nations, for example Norway, Sweden and Great Britain, in the sense that the permanent body of civil servants is responsible for both advice of a professional, specialist nature as well as advice pertaining to political tactics. This has given rise to a running debate, firstly because critics argue that the politicization of the body of administration weakens the democratic legitimacy; secondly because the political decision-makers' working

conditions have become so demanding that many have come to regard it as reasonable that they surround themselves with political advisors.

Against this background, the Ministry of Finance established a committee to investigate the relationship between politicians and civil servants in 1997, which in April 1998 resulted in committee report no. 1354 of the same name. It concludes that there is not a basis to modify the formal roles of the civil service in order to separate the role of “political adviser” from that of “technical adviser.” Both the ministers and civil servants interviewed emphasized the integration of technical and political/tactical advising as an advantage (Ministry of Finance, 1998: 216).

This focus point is based on the report’s conclusion, namely that the role of the modern civil servant ought to integrate the “government-oriented” aspect as subordinate technical advisor in a bureaucratic hierarchy on the one side with the “governance-oriented” aspect - as active, policy-producing and negotiating actor - on the other. The purpose of the investigation is to cast light on the manner with which the actors deal with these virtually incompatible expectations in their daily work, as well as the problems and possibilities that exist in conjunction with the development of the roles of the politicians and administrators that make it possible to co-exist with the various dilemmas.

### **7.1.2. The tendency towards a new division between politics and administration**

The reforms made to the public sector’s regulatory practices through the 1980’s and 1990’s have been characterized by the trend towards New Public Management. New Public Management is not an actual theory concerning the regulation and control of the public sector; rather, it is a collective term for various attempts at optimizing the services provided by the public sector. What these measures have in common - and warrants the use of the New Public Management label - is that they are inspired by managerial measures practiced in the private sector. New Public Management builds on the assumption that it is possible to divide politics from production and thereby also draw lines of division between the tasks that ought to be assumed by the employees and those that ought to be assumed by those who are selected by political means, in other words, the elected. The administrators are to engage themselves in matters related to operations and technical details while the elected politicians are to engage themselves in matters related to politics and principles.

In this research project we will seek to cast light on the sustainability of this assumption, insofar as one of our basic hypotheses is that it is not possible to maintain a meaningful division of labor between politics and production. In that connection it is the goal to develop new terms and

concepts that can contribute to a more meaningful understanding of action, practice and identity in relation to those who are elected and those who are employed in the public sector.

## **7.2. Focus point B.**

**“How do politicians and administrators relate to the concept of and which problems and possibilities does this bear for the construction of new democratic roles for politicians and administrators?”**

This investigative problem is fundamentally related to the fact that the normative basis for all legitimate models for the regulation of society in the western world is that it is to be conducted in a democratic fashion. In the meantime, the situation is such that the common perception of democracy in the western world in the postwar period has been inextricably linked to the notion of representative democracy and the institutions that constitute the electoral chain of command. This means that the traditional understanding of the manner with which democracy is best institutionalized provides us with little assistance when it comes to developing democratic roles for politicians and administrators that are to be able to meaningfully function in a governance-oriented regulatory model. The governance orientation manifests itself in many ways. In connection with this focus point, we would like to draw particular attention to the challenges to the traditional roles of the politicians and administrators. These result from the increased employment of management by objectives, the increased self-regulation that is practised in a great number of public institutions, the introduction of user boards and neighbourhood councils, as well as the institutionalization of networks consisting of politicians, administrators and private actors (volunteer organizations and the heavy hitters from the local business community).

The point of focus is based on an assumption that the managerial tasks that the political system is to going to be forced to cope with in the years to come are of such a character that they cannot be fulfilled by the institutions belonging to the parliamentary system. This precipitates a situation in which it is necessary to address the question of which path to choose in the development of new democratic roles for politicians and administrators. There are two such paths. One can choose the “theoretical path” and seek to deconstruct the very conception of that which democracy is all about in order to develop new terms and principles that stipulate the demands placed on the democratic institutions. Alternatively, one can choose the “empirical path” via a mapping of actual strategies of construction and approach among the central actors in the political system. One can ask: What conceptions do these actors have about what democracy is all about? How should democracy be institutionalized? Which role should they and other actors play? And consequently, how are they to be held

accountable for the fulfilment of these roles?

We are attempting to follow both paths. There is an undeniable necessity for a range of considerations concerning what we are talking about when we name the concept “democracy” - considerations which recognize the concept’s historical and theoretical roots - as well as the need for new thought in light of the present developments that characterize society. These considerations will, among other things, be based on a discussion between the classical conceptions of democracy espoused by Alf Ross and Hal Koch, whose thought has influenced the debate about democracy in Scandinavia in the post-war period. The primary question in this debate is to what extent is democracy a means of regulation or a lifestyle? In the meantime, the very foundation of this debate and the problem at its center is the justification of democracy in human reason that characterized modernistic thought (Hansen & Sørensen, 1998). Today there is need for a development of a conception of democracy that is based in a non-essential argument for its justification. In the end, the justification of democracy does not depend on anything other than its ability to solve conflicts in society through the aggregation of opinions and perspectives, as well as the creation of acceptance in the particular community. This acceptance is influenced by these decisions in order to ensure that these aggregated policies are converted into actual social regulation (March & Olsen, 1995; Sørensen, 1995). In turn, a basis of this nature provides a number of possibilities to be able to develop a more open concept of democracy and therein also new democratic institutions with roles to go with them.

In the meantime it is equally necessary to seek inspiration in empirical studies concerning the conception of actors. There are a number of such studies that focus on society’s perception of what politics and democracy are all about and the role that they themselves play in relation to politics and democracy. One such Danish project is entitled “Democracy from Below,” in which several of the authors of this article are presently participating. The preliminary findings of this study include the discovery of civic roles about which can be said that they lie a good distance outside the traditional role of the citizen that is normally associated with parliamentary democracy. The roles we discovered have been termed the “Everyday Maker” and the “elite activist” (Bang & Sørensen, 1998).

*Everyday Makers* are characterized by their relatively modest interest in “big politics,” which they typically consider to be the realm of the politicians. “Of course I vote, but the politicians are probably best at making the big decisions.” Everyday makers are perfectly satisfied with their role as laypersons in relation to the big politics, as “really I am more interested in the community.” They wish to take part in those things that they as laypersons can contribute to, while the experts take care of the things that they are good at. An aspect of this conception of the political system is that politicians and administrators are not perceived as opponents or enemies. Rather, there is talk of a division of labor: the politicians take care of the big

decisions while the everyday makers engage themselves in everyday matters – that which one can call everyday politics – related to school, work, or the area in which they live. The task of keeping the system tied together is left to the administrators. The everyday makers are not passive. Rather, they are actively involved in some form of activity or another that has something to do with concrete problem-solving in everyday life. Another defining aspect of the everyday maker is that her engagement in her political work is not of a “full-time” nature. Politics is something that she quietly and undramatically participates in as a natural part of life and living. This perception of politics as concrete problem solving in everyday life means that politics loses its ideological character. Instead, the everyday maker approaches politics in a pragmatic fashion: “let’s see if it works.”

*Elite activists* – be they grassroots elites or elites from the business community – engage in a much closer relationship with the “big politics.” They engage in a close and mutually obliging – but informal – means of cooperation together with politicians as well as administrators. It is directed towards community problem-solving of a more abstract nature within a narrowly defined field of policy – for example, policy related to commerce, the labor market, planning of the infrastructure, or social policy. In other words, a kind of “sector elite.” The unique characteristic about elite activists is that in many ways they see themselves as being “at a distance” from the political system, while at the same time they are actually increasingly playing on their “home field” in a close network with public actors. This is particularly the case within issues related to social, cultural and commercial policy.

In order to attain a sense of perspective over the conceptions of roles that characterize contemporary public regulation, it is necessary to complement a mapping of the civic roles with a corresponding mapping of the roles of politicians and administrators. For example, we aim to cast light on:

- what it is like to be a “front-line” administrator in a community full of everyday makers and elite activists,
- how politicians grasp the fact that a number of decisions have been delegated to local political institutions, where they are made by a population that most of all interests themselves for matters of a close, concrete nature,
- how politicians and administrators are able to create a conception of their role that is compatible with management by on the one hand, and a conception of democracy on the other,
- what kind of expectations the politicians and administrators have for a legitimate decision-making process, and
- the extent to which they regard democracy and efficiency as inherently opposed or compatible goals.

When we, on the basis of investigative problems such as those presented above, have attained insight into some of the characterizing aspects of the

roles of the contemporary politicians and administrators – and the conceptions of democracy that they are related to. The task will juxtapose these conceptions of roles and democracy with the theoretical debate concerning what democracy is about. Against that background it becomes possible, in a qualified manner, to address the question as to what extent the contemporary development can be regarded as to a threat to democracy or something that can be advantageous for it. Further along these lines, one could ask in which direction the development of the roles of politicians and administrators ought to move if democracy is to be assured of healthy conditions in the future.

### **7.3. Focus point C:**

**What significance does expertise and professionalism have for the construction and fulfillment of the roles of politicians and administrators, and which perspectives are there for the creation of a new balance between the knowledge of experts and laymen in these two roles?**

Administrative specialists play a central role in the public sector on the strength of their expertise. The solution of the many complicated tasks that the public sector attends to is dependent on the knowledge of experts, and this knowledge is the reason for granting administrative “specialists” a broad range of self-regulation. This is not just in relation to their choice of working methods, but also in terms of the definition of the goals for their work (“they know best”). However, the specialists’ degree of autonomy varies between the different administrative areas. Particularly many service-producing administrative areas have developed into professional bureaucracies where professional groups have assumed both leading and performing functions (Jespersen, 1996). The rationale that has contributed to this development is that expertise and professionalism is the central means to improving the quality of the service in question. The role of the politicians in the service-producing areas has had the character of compensatory regulation, where regulation is conducted particularly via frameworks (administrative and economic) as opposed to content, which is turned over to the specialists - the professionals (Jørgensen & Melander, 1992). As a result of this dynamic, the expertise-based professional values have traditionally been of great influence in these areas of administration, such as health and education. However, the development that has characterized the public sector in recent years would seem to have influenced this regulatory situation and the traditional roles of the specialist administrators and politicians.

In the shift of regulation from “government” to “governance,” new forms of organization and regulation are introduced, as well as an increased pluralism of values related to the “specialist-heavy” areas of public administration. The introduction of political management by objectives,

contract regulation, surveys of users and citizens, user bodies, quality evaluation and the measurement of results are all examples of the new means of management that contribute to the challenge facing the authority of the professionals and experts, and professional autonomy in the problem-solving process. Decentralization also serves to bind together a number of specialist middle managers and institutional leaders and link them closely to the political system so that orientation must be directed from the professions and particular interests towards the organizations' sense of "wholeness" and goals (Ejersbo & Sehested, 1998). All-in-all this development is indicative of a new balance between the knowledge of experts (represented by professionals) and that of laymen (represented by politicians and citizens) in the public regulatory system.

The question is, therefore, how expertise and professionalism comes to affect the manner with which politicians and administrative specialists handle their roles. And what is the character of a new balance – insofar as it is created – between expertise and laymen's knowledge in the roles that emerge in organizations.

The role of professions and expertise in the public sector is at the center of sociologically-oriented research concerning professions. Such work emphasizes the analysis of knowledge-based commercial groups' particular characteristics, roles, strategies and organizational working contexts. Profession research in the 90's builds on a combination of functionalistic considerations (knowledge as necessary and the altruism of professions), neo-weberian considerations (knowledge as symbol and power factor and the professions' own interest), and considerations of the significance of the context (e.g. - particular European and Nordic development of knowledge and professions) (Burrage & Tørstendahl, 1990). In that context there are a number of theories concerning a movement from the modern to the postmodern profession (Brint, 1994, Hargreaves, 1994).

The modern profession assumes an autonomous role in the public sector, where abstract, specialized and scientific knowledge becomes the foundation for the norms and values of society in general and the public sector in specific, and attains the character of objective truth (Tørstendahl, 1990). The professionals then become the bearers of this truth. With time their means of regulation have been developed into both technical self-regulation (the methods) and a great degree of ideological self-regulation (the objectives) both in the sphere of their working situation as well as the area with which they work (Freidson, 1984). The latter occurs, amongst other reasons, because of the monopolization of the leading positions (the professional leaders) and via the professional organizations inclusion in the relevant political decision-making processes (Sehested, 1996). Considered in terms of organization, large parts of the public sector are also built up around functional areas related to tasks and knowledge where professional groups each maintain their respective, limited tasks. There is a common orientation towards the norms and values of the profession, where



leadership and profession are linked together via the professional leaders whose right to lead is founded in their professional ability. Control and discipline is exercised via intern supervision and among colleagues (Sehested, 1996; Jespersen, 1996). In that light, the professions' autonomous role is exercised in the professional bureaucracy, where the politicians assume the compensatory role concerning regulation.

The postmodern profession, on the other hand, adopts a responsive role where the expertise of the individual profession competes with other types of expertise and laymen's knowledge concerning "truth" and values. The means of regulation is democratized particularly in relation to the ideological self-regulation (the goals), for example, by breaking up professional leadership monopolies politicians and citizens enter into the substantial regulation and prioritization of services and the professional organizations then have less influence in the political decision-making processes. In terms of organization, the predominantly specialized and functional construction is broken and organizations are built up according to that which is most expedient from the perspective of the citizens. The professions orient themselves to a greater degree towards the entire organization and its objectives, leadership and profession are uncoupled (for example via the introduction of leaders with a generalist background), and external measures of control of the professional expert's work is introduced (Brint, 1994; Hargreaves, 1994). The politicians' role is modified so that it becomes more pronounced in terms of the regulation and control of matters of substance and ideology.

The question is whether one can discern characteristics that are in common between these considerations on the one hand, and the roles of contemporary Danish politicians and administrative specialists on the other:

- Does the construction and fulfilment of the roles of politicians and administrators register elements of the move from the authoritative status of expertise, to the negotiated status of expertise.
- Which regulative and value-oriented justifications lie behind this development, and how do the actors interpret terms such as efficiency and legitimacy?
- What are the consequences of the development for the efficiency and legitimacy of the political system?

In recent years a number of supplementary academic programs have been established that are aimed at, among others, the technical personnel with medium-ranged education in the public sector as well as the education of leaders in the public sector (e.g. Masters Degrees in public administration). These programs are of great significance for the construction and fulfilment of the new roles for, among others, the administrative specialists. A part of the analysis of this focus point will be to investigate:

- What significance do supplementary educational programs, which are directed towards the administrative specialists, have for both the politicians' and specialists' perception of expert knowledge and the profession's status in relation to the problem-solving processes in the public sector?

The development referred to above concerning the “specialist-heavy” administrative areas can point towards a stronger traditional “Weberian” bureaucratization of the professionally oriented work with clear lines of division between politics and administration, loyalty towards the organization's objectives, clear division between leader and employees, and emphasis on external control and discipline. The politicians set the objectives and control their fulfillment, and the specialists implement them in a neutral manner. This can possibly represent an attempt at “re-conquering” the power from the professions and “re-establishing” the electoral chain of command. On the one hand there is a development towards increasingly equal and negotiated roles between politicians, administrative specialists (leaders and employees) and citizens, where the code words are to a greater degree dialogue, confidence and evaluation. At the present time we do not know where this will go in practice. The perspectives in this development are therefore discussed in relation to:

- Whether the modification of the politicians' and technical administrators' perception of the status of expertise and the profession in questions indicate a shift towards a stronger, traditionally bureaucratic regulation of the technical work and its means of regulation or towards a new orientation in the means of regulation, roles and the distribution of roles?

#### **7.4. Focus point D.**

**How do politicians and administrators regard information and communication technology, and how do they employ this technology in the construction of their roles? Do they experience technology as a barrier that inhibits the development of their roles or on the contrary, as a means by which they are able to reconstruct their roles?**

Over the course of a number of years, Information Technology (IT) as had decisive influence on the development of the *role of the administration*. Internally, in ministries and municipalities, the course of work has been modified and tailored according to the new technological possibilities. The introduction of IT was also one of the factors that enabled the municipal institutions to be able to assume numerous administrative tasks in conjunction with the decentralization that occurred in the course of the 1980's. At the present time there are many municipalities that are working to continue this process of decentralization such that it extends to the individual citizen. In that light, it can be said that there is an extensive number of attempts being made at delegating various administrative

functions “out” to the citizens. This is the case in conjunction with the filing of tax returns, to name but one example, where it is becoming increasingly common that the citizens submit their own information via electronic means directly to the administrative instances dealing with taxation.

The argument for introducing IT into the public sector has been largely presented in terms of efficiency. There is no significant doubt that technology has contributed to an increase in efficiency. Nonetheless, attitudes differ when it comes to the extent to which this increase in efficiency can be attributed to the introduction of IT, just as there are different opinions to the extent to which the increase in efficiency has led to a so-called “technological unemployment.”

The *role of the politicians* has also been affected by information and communication technology. In more and more municipalities it is becoming common that the members of the municipal council are equipped with electronic access to the administration’s archives, just as they have the opportunity to establish e-mail addresses so that the citizens can get in touch with them more easily. The many new web pages pertaining to public administration that are shooting up on the Internet like mushrooms facilitate both access to information, debates in the “virtual forum” about various current matters of debate, as well as direct communication between citizens, the administration and politicians.

In the slightly longer term, one can then imagine that technology can contribute to a strengthening of the politicians’ legitimacy. Politicians are able to establish a closer rapport with the population that they feel they are representing and they are better able to have their finger on the pulse as to what is going on in the population at large. For example, when the Danish Liberal Party (Venstre) created their own home page on the Internet – the first political party in Denmark to do so – it played a role in developing the party’s image as a young, modern party, as well as being a party that listens and is interested in what the common party members feel about current events.

Technology can thus be said to play a significant role in the transition from government to governance. As an increasing number of actors become drawn in to the management of public institutions, the need for increased access to central sources of information increases, just as a need for communication between those involved emerges. The concept of network that is inherent to governance creates an increased need for the ability to circulate great amounts of information more easily and quickly, as well as the possibility to quickly and safely communicate with the involved actors. An additional, significant, element in governance regulation is a responsiveness demonstrated by the public authorities towards the needs and expectations of the citizenry. Technology creates new opportunities for the involvement of citizens in both the formulation of the actual need but also in the evaluation of all of the existing public services.

The focus point is based on a theoretical understanding of technology as a social construction (Bijker, 1995; Bijker, Pinch & Hughes, 1987; Latour, 1987; Jæger, 1995). On the basis of this understanding, technology is not a given factor; rather, technology is created on the basis of the interpretations that the actors have of it. This means that a given instrument of technology develops into different things in different contexts. Just as actors play a role in creating technology, technology plays a role in creating the actors' conditions to act, and in that way technology becomes a part of the framework that contributes to the construction of the actors' roles. In that sense, a simultaneous and reciprocal process emerges between the construction of technology and the role in which it is employed as an instrument.

The project wishes to investigate how administrators and politicians deal with the new technological possibilities and the manner with which technology plays a role in the construction of their new roles. Do the administrators and politicians merely utilize the technology as an instrument for the dissemination of information and communication? Does the technology serve to force the politicians and administrators to modify their roles? Or does the technology in reality serve to further maintain the roles of the past? Who sets the agenda for the use of technology and who perceives the possibilities in the technology?

In that connection we wish to pursue some of the questions that emerge when information and communication technology are put to use in the dialogue between the public administration and the citizenry. The hypothesis that the administrators regard technology as an administrative instrument that can be utilized to inform the citizenry, whereas the politicians regard technology as an instrument of communication that can be utilized to create dialogue with the electorate, thereby opening new democratic channels. This can serve to explain why IT has primarily been employed to spread information. Until now, as has been the administrators (in cooperation with technicians), who lay the final hand on the implementation of technology, for which reason the politicians' perspective on technology and its possibilities has never really been realized.

## **8. Method and approach.**

The empirical dimension of the project is directed towards a mapping of the investigated politicians' and administrators' conceptions of their roles. The empirical work is to be conducted over two phases:

*The first phase* is the orientation phase, which builds on a "*spreading principle*," where we conduct qualitative interviews with many types of

politicians and administrators. There are three characteristics that serve as the criteria for the selection of the interview persons:

1. the level in the public sector at which they are placed,
2. the degree of politicization of the tasks that they are responsible for completing, and
3. the extent to which the organization is influenced by the types of organization and regulation that can be characterized as “governance”

The first two criteria point to ca. 30 qualitative interviews:

- with politicians from parliament, municipal councils and county councils; ministers, mayors from municipalities and counties, politicians serving on committees within the state, county and municipality, as well as board members in local public institutions.
- with administrators: head of departments, chief executive officers from municipalities and counties, institutional leaders in the state, counties and municipalities, office heads in the central administration, and section heads and consultants in the state, counties and municipalities.

The last criterion is used towards the selection of the individual possessor of a role. This will occur on the background of knowledge from other studies concerning new forms of organization management in different public organizations and with help from central informants with a sense of this. The focus of these qualitative interviews will be the actors’ perceptions of their own and others’ roles as well as their view on the relationship between role and the organizational context that they are a part of.

The first phase establishes the background for the *second phase*, which builds on the “*principal of depth*.” The second phase consists of 4-5 *case studies* of pre-selected organizations. The focus of the case studies is the relations between the roles of the politicians, between the administrators’ roles, as well as between the roles of the politicians and administrators, just as the focus of the process is to be on the development of roles and on the significance of the context for the development of the roles. The criteria for the pre-selection of the cases are first to be established after the first phase, as it is not possible, beforehand, to decide which criteria, and investigative questions, will reveal themselves as being determinant for the development of roles. Qualitative interviews also play a central role in the second phase. Additional empirical input will come from participatory observation and the analysis of documents, including primary and secondary sources: primary written materials produced by and for the actors and organizations that we include in the study (letters, memos, notes, reports, instructions, articles for the media, etc.). Secondary written materials concerning the actors and organizations that we include in the study (organizational biographies, case studies, scientific articles, etc.). Interviews, participatory observation and the analysis of documents can help insure a triangulation of the material for the case studies (Yin, 1984).

The combination of the empirical materials from first and second phases does not merely make it possible to draw individual role profiles, but also to uncover the interaction between actors and perceptions and the establishment of institutions. The particular aspect of the method is precisely the attempt to integrate the perspectives of the actor and structure in the analysis.

On the basis of the selection of the case method and qualitative data described above it ought to be apparent that our objective is not to attain representativity or generalizability. The primary aim is, first and foremost, to be able to present analytical generalizations where the analyzed case material serves as the *basis of interpretation* that can later contribute to the debate in the scientific community surrounding?? the roles of politicians and administrators, as well as among practitioners in the public sector as well as between the two spheres (Giddens, 1993; Flyvbjerg, 1991; Jensen, 1998).

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