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City Managers at Work: An ethnographic study on the everyday practices, roles and behaviour of local government elites



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Preface

Last autumn, I was not sure what my last months at the university should entail. I had no clue that my Master Thesis would focus on the beliefs, roles and daily working practices of city managers. I did not expect that my thesis would be conducted with an ethnographic approach. I only knew that I wanted to discover a new context in the public sector and to practice and improve interviewing. These two learning goals have been achieved and actually more than that. The ethnographic approach of the study gave me the opportunity to discover more about local government by shadowing city managers. I had the opportunity to study the craftsmanship of city managers closely, but I also learned more about the practices and societal context of local government or, as some participants called it, “World of the municipality”. The ethnographic approach of the study allowed me to apply a variety of data collecting methods. For example, I conducted observations and open interviews, which were new methods to me. Practicing a novel research approach and methods in an undiscovered context has been a challenging and educational experience for me. I am grateful that I had the opportunity to experience all of this in the last couple of months.

In the beginning of 2016, I committed my first words to paper and I have recently added the last ones. In the meantime a lot has happened. One important aspect is the development of my Master Thesis. This thesis would have never been developed without the patience, support and help of several people. First of all, I would like especially to acknowledge professor dr. Paul ‘t Hart. I thank you for giving me the opportunity to be involved in this research project, for your supervision, commitment and valuable feedback. I also thank dr. Inge Claringbould for the feedback on my research proposal and final thesis. Furthermore, I thank Erik-Jan van Dorp for sharing stories and experiences during the fieldwork, brainstorm sessions and feedback on a number of draft versions of my thesis. Also, my thesis may never have been written without the involvement, hospitality and frankness of the three city managers. I am grateful for their help. In addition, I would like to thank all the other participants who made time available to share their thoughts and beliefs about the craftsmanship of city managers. Last but not least, I would like to thank my family for their support, especially my parents. They may not always have been able to fully grasp what I was talking about, however it really helped me to be able to share my concerns with you and in particular I am grateful for your little sweet messages which motivated me to continue.

Nicole Braham, August 2016

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Abstract

This study focuses on the everyday lives of city managers (CMs). CMs are the secretary of the executive board and the CEO of the organisation in Dutch municipalities. The context in which these municipalities operate and the tasks they are expected to perform have been changing markedly in recent years, with major responsibilities for social, health and youth policy being delegated to them. These changes doubtlessly have had an impact on CMs, who occupy a pivotal position in municipal government. This study explores what CM's do and how they take up and enact their roles. Through an ethnographic approach three CMs are studied up close. Through shadowing, interviews, and diary analysis we obtain insight in what activities CMs pay attention to, what roles they perform and how they do perform these roles.

A typical CM's working day is filled with scheduled meetings, ad hoc encounters with and calls to key actors, and unexpected turns. CMs spend most of their time in three categories of meetings, in which they manage *up* (political office-holders), *down* (the organisation) and *out* (networks). CMs perform three roles: Chief advisor, CEO of the organisation and Connector. CMs perform the Chief advisor role in and outside executive board meetings. In this role they are seen as a sparring partner and institutional memory and form a tandem with the mayor. The institutional memory and tandem practices are found as a way of creating power and influence in the executive board. As the CEO of the organisation a CM chairing the management team, builds capacity and creates a strategic perspective for the organisation. As a connector the CM exercising quality control, facilitates political teamwork and coordination and is an ambassador and networker. Therefore CMs do not principally connect outside the organisation, but still need to create connection within the organisation between different actors. Within these roles each CM has his own managing style, which moreover may vary depending on the arena in which they operate (e.g. the executive board vs. the organisation). A CM can have an analytical managing style in the executive board and a directive style as the CEO of the organisation. Also, CM's role conceptions are related to their managerial practices. Therefore the study found that the three city managers speak the same language, they have comparable meetings, work with comparable actors and play comparable roles. But each put different emphases. The city managers pay attention to activities and actors in a different extent and perform their roles in their own way. The city managers therefore speak with different dialects.

Chapter 1

Observing city managers

It is early spring 2016. I am travelling by train to a municipality in the north of the country. Although the weather is often unstable during spring, when temperature is rising but it can still be cold occasionally, today the weather is pleasant with a clear sky and a nice temperature. In the early morning I walk through the municipality to the city hall. It is a 15-minute walk. I see leaves and flowers budding into lush and green plants. It is 8:15 am and the streets are relatively empty. At the end of the street I notice a large modern building with 'city hall' on the front. I wonder what today will bring and what the day will look like. More specifically, I wonder what a city manager actually does.

Why should we study government elites? As citizens, we should care about the everyday life of public officials, because their professional decisions and actions can greatly affect our own lives. For all their personal, political and professional failures and successes, they make a difference (Rhodes, 2011, p.1). This is why I am interested in their beliefs, the roles they play and what professional practices they apply executing those roles. In the present study, I focus on the everyday life of *city managers (CMs)*. City managers are the secretary of the executive board and head of the civil service in Dutch local government. The next paragraphs explain why it is interesting to specifically study the CMs' roles and practices.

1.1 Societal and local governmental changes

Over the past decades, major changes in society and (local) government took place. The societal changes are part of a modernization process towards a complex and turbulent society. Both continuous changes (trends) and discontinuous changes have occurred. Continuous changes are, e.g. population decline, increasing multiculturalism, globalization, empowerment of citizens, and digitalization. Discontinuous changes include unexpected phenomena such as affairs, fraud, incidents or fires. These societal changes have an impact on the administrative agenda of (local) government (Korsten, 2012, p. 14). Korsten (2012, p. 16) argues that in many cases governments appear to be interdependent in today's complex society. Governments are interdependent on tasks, competences and resources in policy domains. Therefore tasks and resources have been combined in network structures. In addition, tasks and responsibilities were decentralized and transferred from national to local government. As a result, local government has gradually become more important in the Netherlands. Local government responsibilities expanded to different policy fields such as public events, sports facilities, elderly care, youth care, social support and public environment. Recently, local governments became responsible

for policy and implementation of tasks in *the social domain*. It involves policies on unemployment and elderly and youth care. Local government must manage two kind of processes in the social domain; Rules, laws and finance of policy and communication and collaboration with partners and citizens. Also horizontal changes in tasks and responsibilities took place inside local government. Local governments have transferred certain tasks and responsibilities to external (private) parties (Korsten, 2012, p. 38). For instance, many municipalities have stopped with garbage collection themselves and instead contracted the job out to private parties. Also municipalities have been seeking new forms of cooperation with citizens (Arts, Bouwens, Dubbelman & ten Wolde, 2015). This focuses for example on involving citizens in policy development, participation of citizens in projects in their neighbourhood and dealing with safety issues in collaboration with citizens.

1.2 The City Manager

Frederickson & Matkin argued that (2007, p. 36), “*context matters and the governmental context matters greatly, as any public administrator knows*”. So when society changes, the structures and processes of (local) government have to adapt, and consequently so will the craftsmanship of civil servants and the conditions under which they function. For instance, in the past the rule of law and bureaucracy dominated. Contemporary society prioritizes active citizenship and networking participation (Osborne, 2006). This means that policy cannot be developed without any interaction with citizens. Civil servants must consult citizens and actively involved them in policy development. This calls for a change in attitudes and behaviour, e.g. less paternalistic approach (Ryde, 2013).

The city manager holds a key position within local government. The formal position of the CM exists in every municipality. The CM connects civil service, politics and society, and works together with the mayor, aldermen, councillors and the council clerk (Top & Zouridis, 1997). The CM acts as the secretary of the board of mayor and alderman and as the CEO of the municipal organisation. In practice the CM may fulfil different roles, such as assisting the board of mayor and alderman, preparing policy and decision making and coordinating policy implementation. Since governmental context matters the changes in local government may play a role in how the city managers’ perform their craft. City managers’ roles can change with political and governmental developments such as external and internal democratization, information technology, e-government, dualism law (Dutch: dualiseringswet 2002) and decentralization of tasks from national to local government (Korsten, 2012, p. 56).

As explained in the previous paragraphs decentralisation of tasks from national to local government took place. The Dutch Local governments become increasingly responsible in various policy domains. Local governmental context has changed, Horizontal cooperation and transfer of responsibilities to partners are examples of this. The city managers’ role can change along such governmental

developments (Korsten, 2012, p. 56). After all, CMs play a central role in Local government as the CEO of the organisation and advisor in chief. The professional decisions and actions of city managers can affect the life of ordinary citizens (Rhodes, 2011, p. 1). It is therefore interesting to study what they do and how. Therefore this study aims at providing insight in the everyday life of a CM by studying what activities the CMs pay attention to, what roles they perform and take upon them and how they do this (their style of working). I answer the following central question in this study:

What are the beliefs, roles and practices in the everyday life of a city manager?

To answer this central question the study contains four sub-questions:

1. How can a day in the everyday life of a city manager be described?
2. What activities do city managers pay attention to?
3. What roles do city managers take and perform?
4. How do city managers perform these roles?

1.3 Social relevance

Due to social and governmental changes, local government has become increasingly important in today's society. Changes that may have occurred in the roles of the city manager, due to decentralization and horizontal changes, make it of social relevance to study their craftsmanship (Korsten, 2012). Furthermore, lessons from the field will be obtained and could lead to valuable insights for city managers and the city manager association (VGS) about their everyday practices and challenges.

1.4 Scientific relevance

Although public officials have already been studied widely, the current study focuses on a specific public official: *the city manager*. The CM is rarely studied in international literature (Demir & Reddick, 2012). There are some dated publications such as Oosterwijk, 1995; Renou et al, 1993 and VNG, 1980. Only recently some publications have occurred (Grotens, 2015; Van der Kolk, 2015; Van Twist et al., 2015). However, public officials for personal, political and professional failures and successes make a difference (Rhodes, 2011, p.1). Therefore it is relevant to study city managers beliefs, the roles they play and what professional practices they apply executing those roles. Moreover, this study has a different approach than previous publications. Most studies on leadership style and leadership behaviour try to reconstruct perceptions and motives, and rely on surveys and semi-structured interviews. Distance still remains between scholarly and administrative practices. There is much one does not get to see (Rhodes et al., 2007, p. 1). The ethnographic approach of this study tries to open up the "black boxes of elite behaviour". Most studies contain assumptions about the beliefs and interests of public officials, however there is a lack of studies in which elites are studied up close

and personal. The ethnographic approach of this study will contribute to closing this gap by studying the craftsmanship of the city manager while “being there” (Rhodes et al., 2007, p. 4).

1.5 Outline of the study

In this first chapter I introduced the central topic of this study; city managers at work. Also I elaborated on the research question, social and scientific relevance. Chapter 2 provides theoretical insights in city managers’ roles, public management and collaboration. It does so by elaborating on the three sensitizing concepts of the study that formed the theoretical basis to enter the research field. I will explain how I executed my closely studying the city managers at work (chapter 3). I do so by elaborating on the research design and methods. Additionally I thoroughly reflect on the quality of the study, taking ethical considerations and fieldwork into account. Chapter 4 provides an overview over the three cases at hand. It explains background information of the CMs and the municipality context in which they operate. Chapter 5 discusses the first two sub-questions of the study. It describes one day of the life of a city manager and provides insight in a year of the life of a city manager. The chapter provides insights as how the CMs spend their time by describing the results of diary analysis and interviews. It shows to what activities they pay attention to and why. It reflects on the differences between the three studied cases. Thereafter, I describe the three main roles of the CMs; chief advisor, CEO of the organisation and connector (chapter 6). I elaborate on the practices they apply performing their roles (their style of working). I discuss these practices based on interviews and observation data. The final chapter (7) covers the answers to the central research question and reflects on the benefits and pitfalls of this study.

Chapter 2

Exploring the city managers' craft

The explorative and ethnographic approach of the study does not start with hypothesis or preconceived notions. Instead, in accordance with its explorative nature, it involves the researcher attempts to understand and interpret what is happening in the research context. The themes and categories of analysis come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis. I therefore use sensitizing concepts in my study that form the conceptual framework. Sensitizing concepts give a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances, it suggests directions along which I can look. It is therefore a starting point for this study (Bowen, 2006, p. 13).

The concepts derived from a review of the literature on city managers craftsmanship and public leadership. The study includes three sensitizing concepts. The sensitizing concepts provide guidelines about beliefs, roles and practices of city managers. The first sensitizing concept concerns *roles* of city managers. This sensitizing concept gave me a direction in studying what roles a city manager has to perform. During the data collection I knew what main roles previous studies like Grotens (2015) or Korsten & Notten (2005) found. I used this background information to look at the roles the three CM's perform. The second sensitizing concept concerns public management. I used theoretical insights of Noordegraaf (2000) and Rowe and Maason, (1987) to look at the managerial profiles and styles of city managers as the advisor of the executive board and the CEO of the organisation. The third sensitizing concept concerns *cooperation* and explains the importance of networking and cooperation for city managers. This sensitizing concept gave insight in the external role of a city manager. Combined, these sensitizing concepts offer ways of understanding the craftsmanship of city managers (Bowen, 2006, p. 14). The next paragraphs discuss the content of each sensitizing concept.

2.1 Roles of the city manager

The first sensitizing concept concerns potential roles of the city manager. 't Hart (2014) described three roles of public leaders in different sub-spheres; political, administrative and civic leadership. Political role of leaders takes place in a world of decline voter loyalty to parties, far-reaching transformations of governance structures, omnipresent media coverage of political life and constant 'crisis' of one sort or another. Furthermore, much of the public attention revolves around the aspirations, acts and achievements of leaders of parties and governments ('t Hart, 2014, p. 22). Political leaders must construct an imaginary community that followers can feel part of. This involves

including and excluding particular social groups and categories from the community. They have to respond and shape followers perceptions. To become accepted leaders they have to engage in ‘identity entrepreneurship’. They attempt to weave believable narratives about who and what it is they embody and claim to represent. Therefore political leaders are faced with stark choices as how to represent themselves and the group(s) whose leadership they seek. Furthermore, political leaders use ‘windows of opportunity’ (‘t Hart, 2014, p. 25). These are moments where there is the potential to rally forces around a push for major change. The idea of leadership as a combination of exploitation and mobilization lies at the hart of ‘policy entrepreneurs’. They are adept at playing the political game of policy change. It is about the embracing of novel policy ideas, selling them to diverse constituencies, building powerful coalitions around them and seizing the moment when opportunities to do so present themselves.

Administrative leaders concern senior officials who feed political executives with sound and usable ideas, information and advice. They enjoy access to political decision-makers offers senior officials the opportunity to ‘manage up’ (‘t Hart, 2014, p. 29). They frame, time and distribute their strategic advice and thus serve as important gatekeepers in the policy-making processes. Moreover, administrative leaders need make policy work at the front line of implementation and building and nurturing the organizational capacity to accomplish this. They need organizations that enable them to create public value. Public organizations are, however, not simply tools at the disposal of leaders. They are complex and therefore administrative leaders need to build, consolidate, safeguard and transform public organizations in the face of ever-changing environment. Vibrant civil societies provide democracies with a rich mosaic of non-office- based public leadership: watchdogs, moralists, dissidents, clergy members, revolutionaries and social entrepreneurs.

Civic leadership comes to life in explicit relation, and opposition, to the power of political and administrative elites. It has several distinct and not necessarily complementary roles to play. Civil leaders bring societal needs, wants and ideas to the political stage, they monitors critically the political establishment’s responses to these signals, and it harnesses society self-government by engaging in the direct delivery of public services. What tends to be distinctive about such civil society groups is the use of publicity in dealing with government. They contribute to public leadership by drawing attention to the strengths and weaknesses of government action. Sometimes civil leaders also work in tandem with government, tendering for contracts for service delivery that government wants done but for various reasons does not want to carry out itself. Figure 1 provides an overview of the work of public leadership.

Political leadership

1. Constructing identities
2. Forging and selecting public policies

Administrative leadership

3. Balancing responsiveness and professionalism
4. Directing and adapting public organisations
5. Making government work on the front line

Civic leadership

6. Challenging and exhorting political and administrative actors
7. Holding governments accountable
8. Providing meaningful community services

Figure 1

The three roles of public leadership have a way of overlapping in reality. Whether they like it or not, sometimes holders of political offices will find themselves deeply engaged in administrative leadership work. Likewise, top-level public servants cannot completely avoid taking part in political leadership processes, if only because of the strategic advice they provide to their political office holders. Also, civic leaders engage not just in advocacy and watchdog work, but play policy-entrepreneurial roles. And their civic activism comes in the form of heading sizable movements or organizations, they will also have to exercise administrative leadership. As 't Hart mentions, "*it is therefore important not to be naïve about the labels 'political', 'administrative' and 'civic'. They denote institutionally and analytically separable spheres of action, which in reality are often closely intertwined*" ('t Hart, 2014, p. 46).

While reading literature about fulfilled roles and practices of city managers, two main roles for a city manager derives; the advisor of the executive board and the CEO of the organization (Arts, Bouwens, Dubbelman & Ten Wolde, 2015; Grotens, 2015 and Korsten & Notten, 2005). These studies also suggest that the CM plays an important role as a connector between executive board members, management team members, the board and organization and external partners. For example Korsten & Notten (2005) explain that the city manager needs to operate strategically within the executive board. This means that the CM needs to think along with political office holders as well as connect them. In addition, they explain that the CM also needs to manage the collaboration between the civil service and political office holders and the city council clerk. This means that the city manager is a linking pin between the different actors within the municipality. More recently, scientists found that the connector role also takes place in the external environment. Grotens (2015) for example notes that contemporary Dutch city managers have an external focus in addition to managing 'down' (into the municipal administrative apparatus for which they carry end responsibility) and 'up' (towards the political office-holders in the executive board). To deal with this complexity in society, CM's connect more with external partners like executives or managers of (social) institutions, organization or companies. Arts

et al., (2015) divide this external linking pin role into two roles: The social connector and connector in regional cooperation. The first focuses on connection with society. Think of connecting citizens to policy plans and participation within society. The second role focuses more on cooperation between organizations, such as neighboring municipalities and regional bodies.

In sum, the first sensitizing concept concerns roles of CMs. It is expected that the city managers will perform different roles in their craft. Three central roles for CMs are part of the sensitizing concept; the advisor of the executive board, the CEO of the organization and the social connector in the external environment. The CM is a professional advisor and gatekeeper for policy-making processes. Moreover, CM's direct the organization of the municipality and have to adapt the organization to the external environment. An administrative leader feed political executives with sound and usable ideas, information and advice. They enjoy access to political decision-makers offers senior officials the opportunity to 'manage up' ('t Hart, 2014, p. 29). Therefore the first role of a professional advisor found by Grotens (2015) and Arts et al. (2015) is part of administrative leadership described by 't Hart (2014). Moreover, administrative leaders need make policy work at the front line of implementation and building and nurturing the organizational capacity to accomplish this. This is what CM's perform as the CEO of the organization found by Grotens (2015) and Arts et al. (2015). Therefore these two roles can be linked to administrative leadership subsphere. 't Hart (2014) argues the labels 'political', 'administrative' and 'civic' denote institutionally and analytically separable spheres of action, which in practice they are often closely intertwined. Therefore it can be that administrative leaders may fulfill parts of their role in the sphere of political and civic leadership. In line with this Arts et al., (2015) found that city managers play an important role as a social connector. City managers and civil servants fulfill this role by connecting citizens to policy plans and stimulating participation within society. In this way city managers have a role in trying to bring society's needs, wants and ideas to the administrative and political stage. CMs monitor in this way signals from society. They therefore may also operate in the sub-sphere of civic leadership role.

2.2 Public management

Noordegraaf (2000) studied work and behaviour of public managers. He focused on the question 'what do public managers do?'. He used three central concepts to answer this question: attention, ambiguity and rules. One of these concepts, attention, is about what meetings public managers attend. And what informational stimuli they attend. The insights from this concept attention can be used to understand how city managers divide their time and to what activities they pay attention to. He found that each type of public manager had a different mental map and different attention profile. Public managers are part of an informational world, which is full of written and spoken texts: they are confronted with an endless array of informational stimuli, and they constantly send out informational stimuli themselves. In order to act, some stimuli have to be selected at the expense of others. Therefore

variations in managerial work are caused by mental processes, because managerial work is informational and multiple interpretations can arise (Noordegraaf, 2000, p. 230). He developed three mental maps of public managers: policy, process and organization. A mental map makes the informational world accessible, public managers 'see' the world because it is mentally represented: their mental maps provide meaningful summaries of the informational terrain. Because of the existence of these three managerial maps, three types of public managers exist, each with a different attention profile. They spoke the language of public administration, but each has a different dialect:

1. The public advisory managers have strong policy preferences and are involved in struggles over policy issues.
2. Public process managers feel responsible for the smooth running of issues streams.
3. Public organisation managers feel it is their responsibility to restructure reorganize or redirect the organisation (Noordegraaf, 2000, p. 234).

Although these three types are variations to a basic theme, they have comparable meetings, comparable issues and comparable allocation mechanism (shared language), each type put different emphasises (different dialects). The managerial frames of reference differed. There are different accents in terms of actor attention and issue attention (Noordegraaf, 2000, p. 246).

As Noordegraaf (2000) mentions public managers have different orientations and therefore pay attention to different activities, tasks and roles. However, *how* public managers fulfil their roles and tasks can be explained by their managerial styles of working. Rowe and Mason (1987) developed four managerial styles: *directive style*, *analytical style*, *conceptual style* and *behavioural style*. These styles are part of the Cognitive Complexity Model. It uses knowledge gleaned from social psychology, cognitive psychology, structural engineering and organization behaviour. It reflects a person's cognitive complexity and values. The model describes an individual's personality, self-competence, interpersonal competence, situation awareness and problem-solving capability. The managerial styles reflect the way a person uses information and derives meaning from it. Identifying one's managerial style may predict behaviour such as reactions to stress, motivation, problem solving abilities, and general manner of thinking.

The *directive style* is characterized by low tolerance for ambiguity and low cognitive complexity. The orientation is focused on task and technical concerns. Directive managers are practical, autocratic and have a strong desire for power and control. They have a need for speed efficient and satisfactory solutions. People with this style show a preference for structure, information and facts. The style is marked by tight control, hard working toward goals and domineering in decision-making.

The *analytical style* is characterized by high tolerance for ambiguity. The orientation is focused on tasks and technical concerns involving a logical approach. People with this style are typically

intellectual, have a need for control. Analytical managers are characterized by cognitive complexity. They are able to deal with complex and new situations. They analyse details and desire to achieve best solutions.

Managers with a *conceptual style* have high tolerance for ambiguity and cognitive complexity. They focus on people and their social concerns. Such managers are creative and tend to take risks in finding answers. They have the ability to understand complex relations. Managers with a conceptual style are people-oriented, open and have trustful relationships with employees. They are personable, flexible and have strong values. These managers consider things in the long-term and make decisions in a decentralized manner.

The *behavioural style* is characterized by low tolerance for ambiguity. Managers with this style focus on people and social concerns. They are supportive, friendly and open. They focus is on short-run problems and they experiences challenges in making difficult decisions. Behavioural managers rely upon group involvement in decision-making. Figure 2 summarizes the managerial styles features.

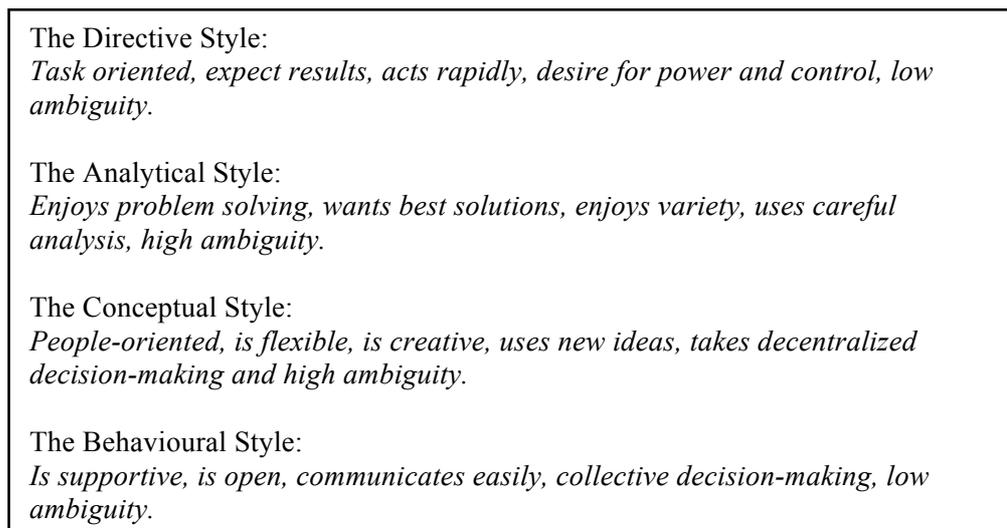


Figure 2

The second sensitizing concept gives insight in attention profiles for public managers. Although CMs may speak shared language of comparable meetings and comparable issues. They may speak a different dialect because of different orientations, agendas and role conception (Noordegraaf, 2000). Moreover, the way in which city managers fulfil their role may differ by their style of working, and we can use the typology of directive, analytical, conceptual and behavioural styles to interpret our observations in the case studies of the city managers, particularly as operate vis a vis the executive board and its members, and as CEO of the organisation.

2.3 Cooperation

The last sensitizing concept is *cooperation*. The Dutch Senior Civil Service's (2015, p. 5) perspective on public service leadership stresses cooperation, integrity and reflection as key qualities required of senior public service leaders. Of these, cooperation is required to be an effective participant in the network-driven, collaborative public management processes that have become pervasive in early 21st century governance. Collaborative management is about the management of interdependencies. Public leaders do not only work in their "own domain". Their ability to deliver the outcomes expected of them depends on the degree of alignment they can achieve with actors in other organizations and sectors over which they have no hierarchical control. Collaborative managers work well together and communicate with citizens or external organisations and create initiatives in networks with the purpose of dealing with complex tasks e.g. delegated responsibilities of social, health and youth policy or refugee's issue. A collaborative leader has a broad network, can operate in different contexts and is able to: act as a connector between society, politics and civil service (1), connect different backgrounds, disciplines, organisations and cultures (2), be actively involved in networks with co-creation (3), keep an overview of the context (4), inspire others and stimulating employees towards creativity and assertiveness (5) and be purposeful while focusing on societal impact (6) (The Dutch Senior Civil Service, 2015, p. 6).

The importance of cooperation in the craftsmanship of Dutch city managers is highlighted in a recent study by Arts, Bouwens, Dubbelman & Ten Wolde (2015). They explain that city managers need to cooperate in their role as an advisor for the mayor and alderman. Moreover, cooperation takes place in the role as manager of the civil service. In addition, they also describe that city managers have two new roles. The first role focuses on being a social connector. Therefore the city manager should interact with society and partners. The second role is being a connector in regional cooperation. This means that city managers need to become active in networks in their region. Also the last sensitizing concept about the increased importance of cooperation for public leaders will be used to study the everyday life of city managers. In sum, the third sensitizing concept covers the collaborative dimension of the work of city managers.

2.4 The use of sensitizing concepts

The three sensitizing concepts have been helpful to gain theoretical insights on city managers craft. This knowledge has been a basis to enter the research field. In that way I could start the entrée interviews with the CMs with at least some impressions on their craft. I asked open questions about their roles and practices, but the sensitizing concepts helped me to understand the CM's answers. Therefore I was also able to ask new questions in relation to their answers. For instance, when CM's started to talk about their non-partisan advisor role in the executive board I did know what previous studies wrote about this role and therefore could link their answers to this. In that way I could ask more sharp, sometimes critical and specific questions during an interview. This has been meaningful for rich insights. Moreover, during the observation weeks I knew who certain actors were due to theoretical information. For example, I understood who the council clerk was and how this actor is related to the CM in theory. This helped me to understand meetings between the CM and council clerk during the week. I could therefore write down when situations occurred that surprised me. So, during the data collection I tried to be open as possible, but the sensitizing concepts helped me with constructing certain frames about the craft of CMs. If I did not have had certain frames, the observations could have been too broad by a lack of knowledge about where to pay attention to. Further, the conversations with CMs could have been meaningless by asking too standard and easy questions. Therefore these frames contributed to meaningful data by creating more in-depth and rich insights. During the data analysis I tried to be open as possible to find roles and practices of city managers that derived from the data. Therefore I did not use theory by reading and analysing fragments of interviews. In the second step of analysis I used the sensitizing concepts to connect the findings of the study to theory. I looked how the data could be connected to the concepts or whether there were contrast or new findings. In this step the sensitizing concepts have been helpful to create order in the bunch of data (see paragraph 3.3).

Chapter 3

Ways of getting up close

This chapter explains and reflects on study design, approach and methods. First of all, the case selection will be described. Moreover, I will elaborate on the ethnographic approach of the study. Then the chapter contains more information about the methods used. For each method the data collection process as well as the data analysis process will be explained. Lastly, I elaborate on the quality and ethics of the study.

3.1 Case study design

In this study, three city managers (cases) have been examined in depth. Yin (2013, p. 47) indicates four types of cases studies. A case study can be based on single cases and on multiple cases. A single case is appropriate if the case is unique and there is only one case available. Yin (2003) argues that more cases give analytic benefits because similarities or contrasts in findings can be found. In addition cases can be holistic or embedded. In a holistic case, one unit will be studied. In an embedded case more units are embedded in one case. These two axes lead to four possible case study designs: A single case study design with a single unit of analysis (holistic), a single case study design with multiple units of analysis (embedded), a multiple case study design with single unit of analysis and multiple case study design with multiple units of analysis (see figure 3).

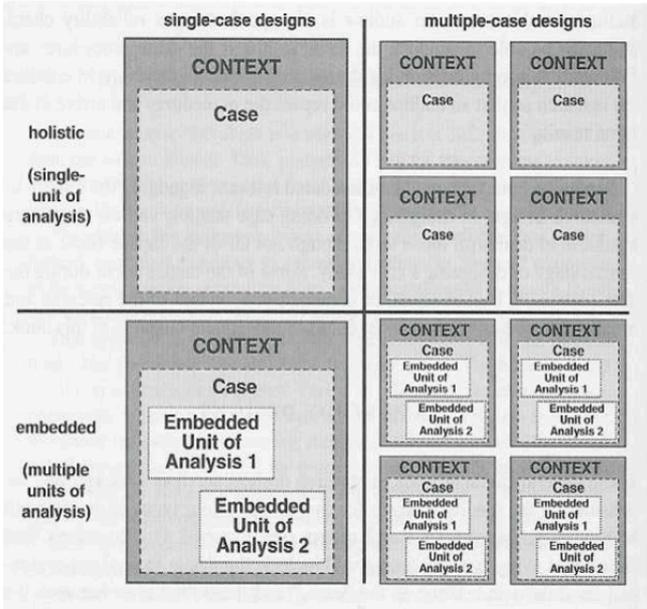


Figure 3 Source Yin (2003, p. 40) Basic types of case studies

This study contains a multiple embedded case study. I studied three city managers (multiple cases). The three CMs are part of the municipality context. To collect data about their craftsmanship I interviewed colleagues and external partners of the city managers (embedded units of analysis). These participants are executive board members, managers, and executive assistants of the municipalities and executives of partner organisations (see paragraph 3.4.2). The three CMs (cases) have been studied on how the city managers divide their time, what roles they perform and their working styles.

The cases were selected and approached with collaboration of the association of city managers (in Dutch: Vereniging van Gemeentesecretarissen, VGS). The three cases are also part of a larger research project for the association of city managers. The association of city managers made a list with possible city managers that could collaborate within the research project. I had the opportunity to choose three city managers for this study. This decision has been based on pragmatic reasons, travel distance and the collaboration of the city manager to participate in the study. The association of city managers first contacted the city managers. After the city managers had confirmed I had the opportunity to contact them to plan an entrée interview. Although each case has been comprehensively described in chapter 4, a short overview is presented:

1. The first case is a city manager from a medium sized municipality, less than 40.000 inhabitants. It is located in one of the Northern provinces. The city manager (CM1) has more than 5 years of working experience as a city manager.
2. A city manager from a small municipality in the north of the country forms the second case of the study. It has less than 15.000 inhabitants. The city manager (CM2) is really experienced within his field of work and worked as a city manager at the municipality for more than 9 years.
3. The last case is a city manager from a municipality that also located in one of the northern provinces and is the biggest municipality of the three cases. It has about 65.000 inhabitants. The city manager (CM3) has one year of working experience within his position at the municipality.

3.2 An ethnographic approach

This study focuses on understanding, describing and explaining the craftsmanship of city managers. It has an explorative design. There is not much in-depth insight about the craftsmanship of city managers. The study uses a couple of sensitizing concepts which form a starting point to enter the research field. The study has an interpretative perspective. This means that the study focuses on finding new meanings and beliefs about the craftsmanship of city managers based on interaction with different actors of the field (Deetz, 1996, p. 202). The findings led to a construction of the beliefs of research participants. In this way in-depth insight about the everyday behaviour, roles and practices of a city manager has been gathered (Deetz, 1996, p. 202).

To find new meanings and beliefs about the craftsmanship of city managers the study has been conducted by an ethnographic approach. The ethnographic approach requires the researchers to be part of the subject being studied. As Flyvbjerg (2001) argues, concrete, context-dependent knowledge is valuable. He emphasizes the importance of “thick descriptions”. This study tries to collect these thick descriptions. It does so by spending time, interacting and observing the everyday life of the subject under study (Tilly, 2006). As Rhodes (2007) mentions, this approach moves beyond public elite interviewing and provides spending time in the research field. Therefore the data has been generated through entering the field to obtain understanding of everyday behaviour and roles of city managers in their profession (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

I observed the city managers at appointments like executive board and management team meetings, bilateral meetings and external or regional meetings. Most of the bilateral meetings took place in the city managers’ office, while other appointments took place in bigger rooms or outside the municipality. In that way I have seen different floors, rooms, organisations and people. Moreover, I have observed how the city managers act and interact with participants and I have noticed what roles they performed. In that why this study describes the craftsmanship of the city manager based on fragments of observations and stories from participants. Therefore as Rhodes, et al. (2007, p. 4) mention entering the research field and “being there” for at least some time has helped to understand the craftsmanship of city managers.

3.3 Methods

Ethnographers reconstruct social action and the meanings of social actors by observing other people’s acts, and by recovering their stories and tracing accounts of things that are happening. Various sorts of methods for studying beliefs and practices are available, that differ in terms of what is observed, how observations take place, what observational periods are chosen, and if and how observations are complemented by other methods. Moreover, ethnographic researchers might trace stories or narratives by interviews to understand how people interpret phenomena (Shore, 2000, 7–11) . In contrast, quantitative methods like surveys focus on finding objectivity and are conducted with distance between the researcher and the respondents (Bryman, 1984).

Ethnographic immersion needs qualitative methods that provide “thick descriptions”, which seek to grasp the day-to-day acts (Geertz, 1993, p. 15). To collect data about beliefs and practices of city managers , a combination of methods has been used: observations (1), interviews (2) and diary analysis (3). The three research methods are complementary. Interviews, are a good way to collect city managers’ beliefs, but is a less trustworthy approach to make inferences about their non-public behaviour (Noordegraaf, 2000, p. 110). Therefore observations are conducted to study behaviour and practices of city managers in their everyday life. In addition, the diary analysis concerns data about

activities of a city manager outside the observation week, but cannot provide a “think description” of the everyday practices and roles as a city manager. In the following paragraphs I elaborate on how each method has been applied in the study.

Shadowing

Observation is the process in which the researcher establishes and sustains a many-sided and relatively long-term relationship with the subject under study. This is done in its natural setting (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). This means that observation takes place in everyday situations rather than in laboratory conditions. Moreover, observation requires the researcher to stay in the research field for a reasonable amount of time and to develop scientific understanding about the subject under study.

Attended activities

For this study a one-week observation per case has been conducted. Within this week I have shadowed the city manager during his or her daily activities. I have conducted observations for a total of 88 hours. This means an average of 29 hours per case. During these observation weeks I have attended several meetings like executive board meetings, management team meetings, external regional meetings, introductory meetings and a lot of bilateral meetings between the city manager and different people from the organisation or executive board. Most of the bilateral meetings took place in the city managers’ office, while other appointments took place in bigger rooms or outside the municipality. In that way I have seen different floors, rooms, organisations and people.

Taking notes

During the observation I used a “fieldwork notebook”. This notebook is an important part of the knowledge of the researcher (Rhodes, 2016). The notebook contains all observation notes. The observation covers notes of everyday activities and behaviour of the city managers. It also contains personal impressions and feelings I had during the week. For example, I wrote down when I had the feeling someone was extremely aware of my presence, when I was feeling tired and had difficulties paying attention to the meeting or something that was remarkable or new for me. I wrote notes during the observation hours at the municipality, and substantial notes were written down at the end of the observation day (Rhodes, 2016). The observation data has been structured in two ways. I always made note of the time during the observation days. Furthermore, I also paid extra attention to four things: The environment where the meeting took place, the central topic of the meeting, what kind of actors attended the meeting and the behaviour of the city manager during the meeting. I observed what questions or remarks the city manager had as well as the attitude of the city manager. In this way the observations took place on a semi-structured basis. This means that the observation left enough space for unexpected turns, but maintained a certain focus (Noordegraaf, 2000). It was important to systematize the field notes. Therefore I made a distinction between etic analysis (the meaning

attributed by the researcher) and emic analyses (the expressed opinion of the interviewee). Notes were clearly distinctive about things that have been said by the interviewee and what my interpretation has been. Lastly, my impact during the data collection has been taken into account (Silverman, 2011). I recognize that I could not be value-free, but I have tried to be as non-judgmental as possible. When I had certain feelings or values during my observation week I tried to be explicit about this in my field notes.

Non-participant observation

A fourfold typology for conducting observations is: complete participant (1), participant-as-observant (2), observant-as-participant (3) and complete observant (4). Whereas in the first typology the researcher is actively participating in the daily life of the field under study and others do not consider the researcher as a researcher, the last is the other way around (Noordegraaf, 2000). I used the complete observant typology during my observation weeks. This means that I always introduced myself as a researcher and was not actively involved in the meetings of the city managers. Mostly, I briefly introduced myself as a student from Utrecht University who conducted her master Thesis on the craftsmanship of city managers. However, sometimes people were curious to know more about the research project and therefore I also elaborated on the content. I shadowed the city managers, so I tried to be as invisible as possible during the meetings. I therefore preferred to sit outside the meeting setting. Also, I mostly chose a place in the room from where I could observe the city manager well. I have been listening to conversations and observed the daily work activities of the city manager. However, in between meetings, in hallways or during lunches I had the opportunity to interact directly with the city managers. Sometimes they asked me to give my view on what I saw; I also used these interactions to ask the city manager to elaborate on things I had noticed. These interaction moments helped to overcome the difficulty of shadowing in a new environment, to fully understand what has been going on.

Elite interviewing

Interviews can be distinguished from one another by their structure. Most of the elite interviewing took the form of a recorded, one-hour conversation around a semi-structured questionnaire (Rhodes, 2016, p. 176). According to Rhodes (2016), the semi-structured interview can be revealing in the hand of a skilled interviewer but courts the danger of becoming a confining ritual. Our conception of an elite interview can be too narrow (Rhodes, 2016, p. 176). In order to obtain rich information, it is important that interviews are free-flowing conversations which interviewer and participant enjoy. Therefore the current study uses not only formal interviews but also notes from informal conversations I initiated during course of the observation weeks.

A key challenge of elite interviewing is to build and keep trust. As a UK minister, Robin Cook, once said about the art of the interview “*to talk for an hour without saying anything too interesting*” (Rawnsley, 2001, p. xvii–xviii). As Rhodes, ‘t Hart & Noordegraaf (2007) experienced trust is not a constant. It has to be constantly renegotiated. Participants may be concerned that the researchers might see or hear inappropriate things. They described different ways to establish trust. One of these strategies is to play the ignorance card: “I am novice, teach me”. This means that the interviewer presents him or herself as generally competent, but not yet has knowledge about the world of the interviewee. Therefore the interviewer can appear both harmless and eager to learn. Although I may not have consciously played this strategy, I believe that my student status, age and that fact that I was relatively new in the practices of local government may have led to this role. I believe this contributed in a way that the different participants indeed wanted to “teach” me and explained interesting context information and details.

Interview topics and questions

A total of 27 open interviews have been conducted. And several short conversations took place with the city managers during the observation week. The interviews mostly started with the same open questions and based on the response of the interviewee other related questions were asked. The open character provided room for the participant to elaborate more on a certain topic and introduce new themes (Silverman, 2011). This also led to an expansion of the topics during the data collection. For example new topics were, the relation between mayor and city manager (1), connection with different actors (2), knowledge and authority (3), social domain (4) and the cooperation with neighbour municipalities (5). I tried to ask very open questions. These kinds of questions gave the participant the opportunity to answer in ways and with the content that is important to him or her and not to the researcher.

Participants

Interviews were conducted with the city managers and with different actors related to the city manager in his or her daily work. The selection of these participants is based on an *up*, *down* and *out* distinction. This means that the interviews covered participants who have a lower and higher position as well as participants who are active outside the municipality. The other participants were selected with the help of the city manager.

First of all, the *mayor and one alderman* were interviewed at every municipality. I chose to do this because the city manager is the secretary of the executive board. Moreover, Grotens (2015) suggests that there is a significant difference in the relation between city manager and the mayor and the relation between city managers and the aldermen. Furthermore, the *executive assistant and a manager* were interviewed. Both are working for the city manager, therefore they know a lot about his or her

day-to-day behaviour and can provide a bottom-up perspective. Within this perspective they gave more information about the city manager as a leader.

Also, a *city council member and the council clerk* were interviewed. Supporting the council used to be part of the city managers' work, but following a reform on the 7th of March 2002 of Dutch local government, a separate role was created to avoid role conflict for city manager. As of that moment, the city manager works exclusively for and within the executive, while the city clerk works exclusively for the legislature (the council). The council clerk therefore provided more information about the relation between the municipal organisation, its executive board and the city council, and on the city manager's role at this interface. The elected members of the council brought an additional, more political, perspective on this same issue. Finally, I interviewed, *executives of external organizations* to obtain an outsider perspective. Two participants are executives of welfare organisations and the other participant is an executive from a neighbouring municipality.. These executives have provided an overview about which developments take place within the environment of the municipality as well as in what way they interact with the city manager..

Conducting the interviews

Before my field research started I conducted a pilot interview with another city manager. In this interview I asked several questions and checked whether the city manager understood these questions. I also asked for some feedback and this has helped in the preparation of the upcoming interviews.

During the data collection the executive assistants addressed the actors with the question whether they would like to participate in an interview. Moreover, the executive assistants planned the interviews for me. Most interviews took place after the observation week, enabling me to raise questions based on what I had seen during the observation week. It had the added advantage that by the time the interviews took place, most participants already knew me and I felt more comfortable about occasionally asking sharp or sensitive questions.

Most interviews took place in the municipality in the office of the participants. The interviews with directors of the external organisation took place at their own organisation or at the municipality. I also conducted one interview at the home of a city council member. And one interview took place by phone, because the participant did not feel well that particular day. Most interviews had the duration of 40 to 60 minutes. I asked every participant whether it was fine to record the interview. In that way I had the opportunity to literally transcribe the interview afterwards. I interviewed different actors around the city managers. The different background, position and perspective also contributed to the quality of the study. In this way it has been possible to receive a deeper understanding of the craftsmanship of the city manager.

Analysing the interviews

With the inductive and explorative approach of the study in mind, an open coding process of the interviews took place. Open coding is the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing the interview data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I coded the interviews manually in Microsoft Word. This means that I read all interviews very carefully and I divided the fragments of the interviews. These fragments were compared to each other and grouped into categories dealing with the same subject. I copy past the fragments of interviews that dealt with the same subject in a new word document. Each of the categories received a suitable code based on the substantive link between the fragments. This means that the codes form a summarizing phrase that expresses the meanings of the fragments. This open code process I found 12 codes. These codes were not framed in roles of the city managers yet.

Following this open coding process, I created a connection between the different categories. Within this process I checked whether each fragment had been coded properly, or if it should be assigned a different code. Moreover, I related categories to subcategories and specified the dimensions of a certain category. I also tried to frame the codes as roles for the city managers. The fragments did fit three main roles. It also has been a process in which I determined which elements in the research are important and which are less important ones. Therefore some of the earlier codes and fragments were not placed under the three roles. In that way I have made choices among the codes and the connections between them. The sensitizing concepts also came into play during this phase (Charmanz, 2006). The sensitizing concepts gave me ideas and directions about the behaviour, roles and activities of a city manager for example, the first sensitizing concept (roles) gave me insight in the roles a city manager has to perform. Three roles were expected from theoretical insights. I read more about their role in the executive board and in the organisation. Moreover, I knew that recent studies found that city managers increasingly need to perform a connector role in the external environment (Arts et al, 2015). However, I did not know what role conceptions the CM's studied here would entertain. During the axial coding process I found that the three CM's prioritized three main roles: chief advisor, CEO of the organisation and connector. In addition, I found practices through which they perform these three roles.

Diary analysis

The diary analysis provides insight in what appointments the city managers have during a year. Moreover it discloses how much time is spent on certain appointments. The diary therefore gives information on what a city manager actually does, or at least what the city managers of this study do (Flemming 2008). The diary gives additional information on the interviews and observations by describing how much time the city manager spent on a certain activity.

Diary design & codes

The diaries from the entire year 2015 were analysed to obtain a good impression of the city managers work. One of the city manager started halfway through the year 2015, therefore his diary has been analysed from then till may 2016. The executive assistants of the city managers provided the diaries. Although the diaries are electronically kept, I received a printed version. The three diaries have the same structure and design (Microsoft Outlook). The diaries have been analysed on a weekly basis. In this way I could notice what activities the city managers had on each day. Moreover, the time as well as the purpose and actors of the meeting have been visible.

The various activities were coded in categories. These categories have been created based on the three main activities of the city manager found in previous studies: secretary of the executive board, CEO of the organisation and social connector (Grotens, 2015; Arts, Bouwens, Dubbelman & Ten Wolde, 2015). The categories were also based on Moore's (2013) public value framework. According to Moore, public managers carefully aligning the 'managing up' to authorizes, 'managing down' to optimize their own organisation's operational and the 'managing out' to partners and stakeholders. In line with this the following categories were used to analyse the daily activities of the city manager: *political office holders* (up), *management* (down), *network* (out) and *social, travel* and *other*. The activities on the first category *up* concern activities related to the executive board and the city council. The second category *down* relates to managing activities in the organisation. And the third category *out* focuses on activities with actors outside the municipality. The category *social* contains appointments for dinners, drinks and ceremonies. The category *travel* focuses on the traveling hours by bike, train and car to meetings. The last category *others* contains for example private appointments, introductory meetings, interviews or meetings that could not be placed in one of the former categories. Table 1 provides an overview of each of the categories.

Codes	Sub codes	Meaning
Up	Collective	Meeting with two or more political office holders (mayor and Aldermen)
	Individual	Meeting with an individual political office holder (Bilateral)
Down	Direct Report	Meetings with employees that directly report to the city manager (Secretary, directors or management team)
	Executive Assistant	Meeting with the executive assistant
	Others	Meeting with other employees or actors in the organisation
Out	Local	Meeting in a local network / external organisation in the municipality
	Regional	Meeting in a regional network / external organisation in the region
	National	Meeting in a national network / external organisation in the country
Social		Social events such as lunches, dinners or drinks
Travel		Travel hours by car, train, bike or walking to an external meeting
Other		Activities that do not fit within the former categories (such as interviews, private appointments)

Table 1

Analysing the diary

Every activity recorded in the diary has been coded and placed in one of the categories explained above. I clearly read the purpose of the activity and what actor was involved in it. Sometimes it was not directly clear to me with who the meeting took place. In that case I used Google to find more about the actor. This helped me with choosing in which category a certain activity fitted. Sometimes both actors from the category *up* and *down* were presented at a certain meeting. In that case I divided the time equally between the two categories. When I was unsure about a certain activity or had the feeling that it did not fit within one of the categories made, I coded it as *other*. I did a coding check with one of my colleague students. This means that I coded a week of the diary of one of the city managers from his study. We then discussed the differences, commonalities and issues during the coding process. However, the diary analysis still has some limitations. The city managers may not have done everything that has been recorded in the diary and they do activities that the diary does not record. Furthermore, some activities that were recorded in one of the city managers' diary were not recorded in another diary. For example, think of the city council meetings or traveling time. This limits the comparison of the outcomes of the three diaries. One diary has also been analysed in the year 2016. The year 2016 may consist of new actualities that have influence on the way the city manager divides his or her time.

Table 2 provides an overview of the data collection methods used in this study.

Method	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Interview	Entree and exit interview city manager	Entree and exit interview city manager	Entree and exit interview city manager
Interview	Mayor	Mayor	Mayor
Interview	Alderman	Alderman	Alderman
Interview	Secretary	Secretary	Secretary
Interview	Council Clerk	Council Clerk	Council Clerk
Interview	Council member	Council member	Council member
Interview	Member of management team	Member of management team	Member of management team
Interview	Director of external organization	Director of external organization	Director of organization
Observation	One week participant observation	One week participant observation	One week participant observation
Diary	Diary 2015	Diary 2015	Diary 2015

Table 2

3.5 Quality of the study

In this paragraph I explain how the quality of the research has been warranted.

Critics of observational methods use potential sources of bias to claim that ethnographic methods are unreliable and that even if they are not, they do not allow for any meaningful generalization (Rhodes, 't Hart & Noordegraaf, 2007). Rhodes et al. (2007) agree that pitfalls exist, however these pitfalls differ in degree. Therefore for ethnographic researchers, there is the question of how do we evaluate the quality of research (Rhodes, 2016). As Geertz (1993) explains the ethnographic approach and the distinctive research methods are not just a 'soft' version of the 'hard' quantitative data. They simple differ in aims and knowledge. Therefore he argues that, reliability, validity and generalization are not relevant to the aim of the ethnographic research. Ethnographic researchers should not focus on quality in terms of reliability and validity, but should provide openness in their accounts of data generation, being explicit about how they formed their explanation (Rhodes, 2005). Therefore I carefully explained in the paragraphs above the decisions made during the research process. For example, I elaborated on the case selection, participant selection, way of conducting interviews and observation and the data analysis.

The ethnographic approach is concerned with worlds of meaning and subjectivity to understand and deconstruct those realms of human experiences and social action (Rhodes, 2016). Therefore the aim has to be to understand what the craftsmanship of city managers looks like from the their point of view. By triangulation of methods I collected beliefs and opinions of participants. The data has been compared. In this way contrasts and similarities within findings could be obtained. Based on these comparisons I tried to create a story that is inter-subjectively true. This contributed to the quality of the findings.

Furthermore, ethnographic research gets below and behind the surface of official accounts by providing texture, depth and nuance, so the findings of the study have richness as well as context (Rhodes, 't Hart & Noordegraaf, 2007). The ethnographic fieldwork has other advantages. As Wood (2009) notes, it is a source of data not available elsewhere and is often the only way to identify key individuals and core processes. It is well suited to understand 'the black box' of processes of groups or organizations. It therefore recovers the beliefs and practices of actors. The richness and in-depth knowledge enhances the quality of the research findings.

The ethnographic approach forces the researcher to come to terms with the challenges of the study, the researcher's role and limitations of the data. The pitfalls of close-up and personal studies cannot be hidden when researchers are forced to negotiate and gain access to the corridors of power (Rhodes, 't Hart & Noordegraaf, 2007). Therefore I will reflect on the pitfalls of the study in chapter 10.

3.6 Ethics

Theoretically any means can be used to gain knowledge to answer the research question of the study. Think of a private conversation, personal letters or undercover participation. However, I do not work this way. Instead I used ethical rules to protect the participating city managers from any harm. Ethics in this study are concerned with finding a balance between benefits for the study and the risk of harm for participants (Boeije, 2010). Three measures are used to guarantee participant's safety in the current study.

- A confidentiality statement has been signed when the city manager preferred this. In this document I did agree on the obligation that sharing any political or official sensitive information with the outside world is forbidden
- The cases in this study are anonymously described
- The city managers had the opportunity to read relevant pieces of the manuscript and gave me feedback on the correctness of factual information

Furthermore, I informed every participant (the city manager and related actors) of the study about the nature of the data collection and the purpose for which the data would be used. Therefore the participants were placed in a situation where they can decide, in full knowledge, whether and how to participate (Boeije, 2010). Moreover, I tried not to be normative within my analysis and descriptions. When differences between the city managers' behaviour and interpretations of their roles became apparent, I did not use these findings to make value judgments. Throughout, I tried to remain faithful to the main purpose of the study: to provide an in-depth insight in the everyday work of a city manager and the meanings attributed to that work.

Chapter 4

City managers in their work contexts

In this chapter the three city managers and the context of the municipalities are described. The chapter begins with some general information about the Dutch municipality system and organisation models. Then the three CM's and their working context will be further described. It provides insight in the municipality, the organisational structure, the CM's profiles and current topics the CM's have to deal with. To protect the anonymity of the city manager, I use 'he' in the description of the cases because there are more male than female city managers.

4.1 The Dutch municipality system

Municipalities form a separate tier of government in the Netherlands. Central government and provinces delegate duties to the municipalities. Moreover, the Dutch municipalities have a general power of competence. This means that they are free to define tasks and create competences, as long as these do not conflict with national or provincial statutes (Heinelt, Sweeting & Getimes, 2006).

All Dutch municipalities have a city council, executive board and civil service. The most relevant positions are those of enfranchised citizen, council-member, alderman, mayor and local civil servant. The city council is an elected body which represents the local citizenship. It is therefore conceived as a crucial channel in communication between citizens and their local government. The city council has an internal (making local government responsive to 'the voice of the people') and an external role (voicing demands and opinions of the local community in public debates). It is elected every four years. All EU citizens over 18 and all non-EU living for at least 5 years in a municipality are eligible to vote. The number of councillors increases with the population size of the municipality. The allocation of seats on the council to the political parties is determined by a system of proportional representation. The council's role, as the head of the municipality, is defined in terms of steering, control and scrutiny. As noted earlier, the council clerk supports the council and its committees. This official is to be appointed by the council. In small municipalities the council clerk will typically be on his or her own, in large municipalities a small staff will support him or her (Denters, et al., 2005).

The executive board consists of one mayor and aldermen. The board has the power to deal with the daily routines of local government, the preparation and execution of council decisions, and the organisation of local administration. This means that the board's scope rules are rather broad. The mayor is the chairman of the executive board and the city council. The mayor is appointed by the central government upon recommendation of a confidential committee and commissioner of the King.

Since the 1970s, central government has sought the advice of the council when deciding upon mayoral appointments. In about 70% of the cases central government heeds local advice. The mayor has several statutory powers (granted by national law) in the field of public order and public safety. Councillors elect the aldermen on the executive board. The executive board, in addition to its general responsibilities has specific powers in executing many national policies in co-governance arrangements (Denters, et al., 2005). The city manager is the secretary of the executive board. This means that the city manager can give advice within the board, but is not a voting member of it. Furthermore, the city manager is the chief executive officer (CEO) of the civil service. The mayor and aldermen (formally) appoint the civil servants.

4.2 Models of municipal organisations

According to Aardema & Korsten (2009), most municipalities have varied their organisational models over time, with different epochs seeing a particular model being en vogue. Sequentially, these have been the so-called secretary model, the sector/domain model and the directorate/division model. The models differ in terms of the organisational structure and organization of operations. First of all, in the sector/domain model policy and implementation are integrated in policy domains. In the other two models policy and implementation are two separated divisions. Second, back office tasks like finance, control, information and automation are in two of the models clustered and centralized in a back office division. In the sector/domain model this is decentralised and divided in divisions where managers are responsible for back office and production. Third, the degree of power of CMs differs. In the secretary- and the directorate/division model CMs have a significant degree of power as the CEO of the organisation. In the sector/domain model managers are each responsible for their 'own division' and the city manager is less powerful.

In the 80's municipalities predominantly adopted the secretary organisation model. Policy was created and managed in the secretary department and was implemented in the services department. The most complicated part of this model was the cooperation between the services department and secretary department; it was therefore difficult to connect policy and implementation. The executive board had to deal with different advice from both. Questions arose what advice was preferential. To anticipate on this negative effect, municipalities developed the sector - / domain model in the 90's. In this model policy and implementation were connected in different domains. This organisation model was related to a business way of operating. This means that the managers became responsible for the back office (input) and the production (output). However, in this model compartmentalization was at stake. Managers focused on their own business and were powerful. Strategically thinking and acting on an organisational level was limited. Municipalities changed these negative effects by the introduction of the directorate- / division model. This organisation model focuses on quality of services. Departments are divided in a logic way of thinking for clients (citizens). It consists of a policy department, public

space department, a front office (customer services) and a back office (operations). Moreover, the city manager has a significant degree of power as the CEO of the organisation. These three organisation models are used to discuss the organisation structure of the municipalities. Each case, a city manager and the municipality context, is described in the following paragraphs.

4.3 Case one: a middle-sized municipality

The first case concerns the city manager (CM1) of a municipality located in one of the northern provinces. It has a population of around 30.000 inhabitants and encompasses the central town as well as some surrounding villages. The municipality consists of an area of more than 5.000ha and lies at the crossroads of a number of rivers and streams. Despite its modest size, the municipality is not regarded as a rural town. The city manager, for example, had picked it as a place to work precisely because he did not see it as rural: *“I really wanted to work for a more urban town, I’m not from the countryside. And besides that the municipality is a lovely place”* (Int. 1). The age category between 45-64 years is most strongly represented with 28% of the population. 10% of the population are immigrants from countries such as Turkey, Morocco and Suriname. Around 19.000 jobs divided over 2.790 employers exist in the municipality (part time, fulltime and temporary workers). Most jobs contain working in healthcare, retail and industry. However, over the past years the employment rate shrunk and currently 6,6% of the inhabitants is unemployed.

The town’s executive board consists of the mayor and four aldermen from four political parties. The executive’s work is guided by a coalition agreement that identifies several core policy priorities, including increasing employability, increasing participation in the social domain and improving the municipality’s fiscal position.

The city council has 23 seats, which at the time of the study were held by eight parties, seven nationally active parties and one local party. The latter is the largest party in the city council, but does not take part in the governing coalition. As the councillor of the local party explained, *“During the past years, we have become the largest political party in this town. However, historically we are an activist party and that’s why we are not always represented in the executive board”* (Int. 5). The office of the council clerk supports the city council with communication, preparation for council meetings and providing advice. It consists of three people, the council clerk, the deputy clerk and a clerk employee (Int. 4).

Organisation

The city manager is the managing director of the organisation, supported the municipality’s management team, which in addition to the city manager consists of three section managers and a concern controller. The concern controller is an important independent advisor for the city manager.

One of the managers manages two departments. The other two are each responsible for one department. Moreover each department has different teams, which are managed by a team leader. The organisation has 10 team leaders in total. Most of the internal contact of the city manager takes place with the members of management team, however when necessary the city manager is also in contact with the team leaders (Int. 1). The civil service consists of 270 FTE. As the mayor said “300 people are working in this organisation. That means that you know everyone and communication lines are short” (Int. 2).

The organisational structure of the municipality follows the representative of the directorate- / division model (Aardema & Korsten, 2009); policy and implementation are separate divisions. The organisation has four divisions, policy (1), public space (2), client contact (front office) (3) and operations (back office) (4), in this organisation model the managerial functions are centralised and the city manager has a significant degree of power as the CEO of the organisation (Aardema & Korsten, 2009). The organization model is shown in the figure 4.

Case one: Organisation structure

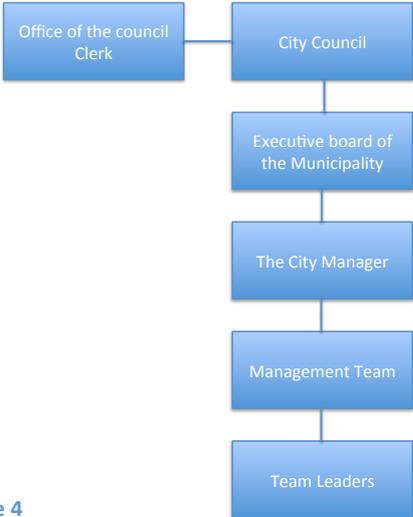


Figure 4

The City Manager

The city manager has worked at the municipality for more than five years. Previously, he had worked in advising and managerial functions at other municipalities. Within these functions he really enjoyed working at the interface of the administration and organisation part of a municipality. For this reason, CM1 had in mind that it would be great to become a city manager someday. CM1 explained that he supports the executive board to further develop and on the other side is busy with focusing on what challenges the municipality is facing and in what way the organisation can deal with and anticipate on these challenges.

CM1 is regarded as a smart and intelligent person. According to different actors within the executive board and the organisation the city manager is a fast thinker, analytically sharp and able to connect many different aspects, situations and cases. Moreover, he is regarded as a person with a hands-on mentality. This means that the city manager reacts fast on situations. Furthermore, he has a clear vision for the organisation and a good political administrative sensitivity.

Current themes

One of the departments cooperates with a neighbouring municipality. The department focuses on public space policy, management and implementation. This cooperation was started recently and will probably be expanded in the coming years. As one of the managers said *“Yes we want to merge with our counterpart department in the neighbouring municipality, however how we will deal with the cooperation and what the new policy for the department will be is not clear yet”* (Int. 3). CM1 sees the nurturing of more intensive cooperation between the two municipalities as one of his main tasks.

Another current theme is the development of the social domain, where the organisation needs to guarantee developments within the social domain. As CM1 mentioned, *“it is of interest to bring the transformation one step further, while the program goes back to the operation”* (Int. 1). The municipality has had to deal with budget cuts the past years. Therefore, the city manager had to deal with reorganisations for the last four years. As the mayor said *“The organization is now more tightly tuned, but people have more freedom within their operation”* (Int. 2). Changes such as more flex working and working at home took place.

On the same note, one of the administrative themes concerns on finding balance between administrative requirements and the financial situation of the organisation. Therefore the city manager believes it is important to look at the longer term for the substantive tasks of the city. Moreover, some administrative themes are about the process of receiving refugees, the development of the inner town and the range of shops.

4.4 Case two: a small municipality

The second case concerns the city manager (CM2) of a small municipality in one of the northern provinces. It has a population of less than 15.000 inhabitants and encompasses different villages. The municipality has more than 10.000ha and lies in a peaceful and green environment. 2% of the inhabitants are immigrants. Most inhabitants are between the ages of 45-64 (31%). Around 1000 employers offer more than 3.700 jobs in the municipality (part time, fulltime and temporary workers). Moreover, the municipality collaborates within the social domain; it has a regional function in social services. CM2 is actively involved within this *“Close to the station you can find a social service organisation, this is from the four municipalities. I am the direct supervisor of the head of the social*

service organisation” (Int. 8). The current task contains the integration of some social services towards one executive organisation.

The city council has 15 seats which at the time of the study were held by eight parties, six nationally active and two local parties. One of the local parties is the largest party in the city council. The executive board usually consists of the mayor and three aldermen from three political parties. However, during my observation time the executive board consisted of two aldermen. The former alderman had resigned due to tensions within their political party. According to CM2 this is not a new phenomenon *“In the past nine years, especially in my first years I was already working with my fourth mayor and third executive board. In the meantime an executive board stopped working together, a mayor left and a mayor got ill, so in the beginning it was a hectic period”* (Int. 8). However, CM2 continues that it has become more stable again in the last years. The executive’s board work is guided by a coalition agreement that identifies several core policy priorities, including the quality of housing and the living environment, village and rural area economics and social services.

Horizontal organisation

The city manager is the managing director of the organisation, supported by the director of operations and five team leaders. In total the organisation consists of 11 teams. Therefore the organisation has a horizontal organisation structure. The organisation works together with other municipalities on the subjects; Social Domain, ICT and Human Resources. The teams operate in three work fields: customer contact, development & accomplishment and internal services. The work fields are representatives of the sector - / domain model in which the three main groups are citizens, space and operations. Moreover, integration of policy and implementation exists in each work field (Aardema & Korsten, 2009). However, the management level is centralised by the two directors of the organisation. This differs from the sector-/ domain model in which the management functions are decentralised. In that way CM2 has a significant degree of power as the CEO of the organisation. Therefore, the municipality model consists of a combination of the two organisation models described by Aardema & Kosten (2009).

This organisation structure was introduced in 2014. CM2 is content about the structure changes *“In our new model the responsibilities are more clearly divided. In the past almost everything was discussed in the management team”* (Int. 8). Moreover, this gives CM2 more freedom to focus on the executive board and external networks. The director of operations is responsible for the internal processes such as personnel, information and financial subjects. The city manager is responsible for the policy side and the external processes. According to the director of operations *“This fits within his advisor role in the executive board. The city manager works more closely on those kind of areas than I do”*. However, he also mentioned, *“we still have a shared responsibility in organisation strategy and*

development and we discuss several cases on a weekly basis” (Int. 9). Figure 5 contains an overview of the organisation structure.

Case two: Organisation structure

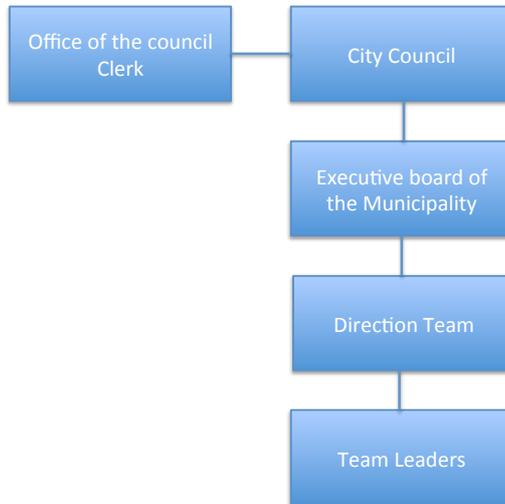


Figure 5

The City Manager

The city manager has a long history in working in public administration. He works in public administration for almost 40 years. The city manager has work experience in multiple municipalities as well as within the different layers of government. About nine years ago the city manager got detached to the current municipality to sort out the planning and control. The city manager enjoyed working at the municipality and started to work as the head of the financial department. From this position on he started as the interim city manager of the municipality. As the city manager now explains, “I had the idea to look for a new city manager, but actually it never got that far. So, I kind of dropped into it” (Int. 8). The city manager explains that several changes took place during the past years, these changes within the environment and organisation make his work interesting. CM2 is regarded in the organisation and executive board as a clear, straightforward and decisive person. In that way he is good at decision-making. He is also described as a natural leader who has a strong vision, gives directions and has great proof of organisations structures and processes.

Current themes

CM2 focuses on the development of the organisation to become a broad network structure. This development especially takes place in the social domain. The city manager coordinates the collaboration within the social domain. The challenge for the city manager is to build one organisation within the four municipalities. CM2 mentions, “one depends on four organisations, each with their own boss and therefore you try to achieve shared points of views through consultation. I try to control

this reconciliation process” (Int. 8). Another current topic is the reorganisation of the municipalities. It is unclear how the reorganisation process will further develop, therefore the city manager has to deal with the developments and discussions around this topic. CM2 explained “*you see that the reorganisation discussion is also alive amongst employees. When you publish some updates on the intranet you notice that employees want to discuss more about the topic*” (Int. 8).

A third topic in regional collaboration is the dossier about the earthquakes. This is also a complex dossier the city manager has worked on. As the mayor nicely summarizes, “*So at the moment, especially in this environment, there are a couple of developments where it is essential that the city manager plays outside his own organisation, shows his face and takes his role in different networks*” (Int. 10). Lastly, CM2 mentioned that the organisation has to develop connection to the external environment. He explained that some teams are already making connections in different networks and with citizens. Other teams are still developing this process.

4.5 Case three: a larger municipality

The third case concerns the city manager (CM3) of the largest municipality of the three cases. It is also located in one of the northern provinces, has more than 65.000 inhabitants and encompasses a central city and surrounded villages. In total the municipality area has more than 8.300ha. 6% of the inhabitants have a different nationality from countries such as Turkey, Suriname and Aruba. Most people are between the ages of 45-64 (28%). The category of 15-24 years is the smallest represented with 11% of the inhabitants. Within the municipality there are about 36.000 jobs divided over 4.600 employers (part time, fulltime and temporary workers). Most jobs are in the service delivery, trade and transport and healthcare sector. The unemployment rate is 8% of the population.

The executive board consists of the mayor and four aldermen from four political parties. The executive board’s work is guided by a coalition agreement that identifies several core policy priorities, including living, working, participation, collaboration and fiscal position. The aldermen work for respectively 2 and 6 years at the municipality. This mayor and city manager became part of the executive board of this municipality last year. According to CM3 “*I have a good relationship with the mayor, we started almost simultaneously in the executive board*” (Int. 15). The city council has 33 seats which at the time of the study were held by nine parties, seven nationally active parties and two local parties. The office of the council clerk supports the city council with communication, preparation for council meetings and providing advice. It consists of five people and 3,8FTE: the council clerk, the deputy clerk, a council advisor and two administrative employees.

The organisation

The city manager is the managing director of the organisation, supported by the municipality's management team, which in addition usually consists of six section managers and a concern controller. However, one of the managers has been in a reintegration process and therefore the management team temporarily consists of five managers. The organisation has six departments and 24 teams. The departments are policy, customers, public space, services and implementation. This means that the organisation structure is a representative of the directorate - / division model. As explained in the previous (paragraphs 4.3.1 and 4.4.1) in this organisation model policy and implementation departments are separate from each other. Moreover, the managerial functions are centralised in the management team of the organisation (Aardema & Korsten, 2009). In total 700 employees are working for the organisation. Most of the internal contact of the city manager takes place with the members of management team, however when necessary the city manager is in contact with team leaders. The organisation structure is visible in figure 6.

Case three: organisation structure



Figure 6

The city manager

When CM3 speaks about his career he jokes and smiles “*I have always wanted to become a city manager*” (Int. 15). He explains that it is a joke, however the city manager did always want to work in the public sector. After his bachelor study in public administration the city manager started to work for a large municipality in the north of the country. Later he started to study at university and got his academic degree in public administration. This led to new advisory and management functions in the municipality. The last years CM3 has been part of a management team as a concern controller. In that

way he got in touch with a city manager function. When the vacancy at the current municipality came, the city manager applied. The city manager enjoys working in the combination of management/organisation and the executive board, *“These two elements come together in the function of a city manager, both in the same proportion approximately and I really like that”* (Int. 15). CM3 is regarded as by others as reliable and accessible. He is thoughtful and has a good overview of the organisation. Within the daily hustle and bustle of the organisation he stays calm. The city manager is someone who takes deliberate actions, is smart and focuses on future.

Current themes

One of the main challenges for CM3 is to increase the participation and collaboration of the employees in society. The employees of the municipality need to change their current working patterns by becoming more active in different networks. The city manager sees this as a challenge for the organisation and believes that training and education should contribute to the development. However, CM3 explains *“Were are not that flat modern organisation that some start-ups are, but that way of working is expected from us. Moreover employees need to have intrinsic motivation and the changes should not lead to confusion, because the daily job still needs to be done. That is a big challenge”* (Int. 15). Moreover, there are currently two large programs the city manager is involved in. One of these programs is within the social domain and the other contains a development of the infrastructure of the municipality. As the mandatory of both programs, the developments within the programs are directly reported to CM3. Finally, the first two years of the coalition agreement (in theory, half their term) have been passed. This means that the executive board focuses on what they have reached and what they want to focus on for the next two years. The decisions the executive board should be translated towards the organisation. It is of importance that the tasks for the next two years match with the capacity of the organisation.

To summarize, the CMs work in different contexts, e.g. the size of the municipalities, organisation structures and the composition of the executive boards and the city councils. Also, CMs have to work on different issues and topics. It is not the purpose of the research to study these differences, however the case descriptions concern background knowledge about CMs and the municipality context which they are part of. It therefore provides insight in the work context of the city managers. Although this context may be different on certain features, CMs have to act within the basic structure of a municipality. They operate within the executive board and organisation and work together with mayor, alderman, council clerk and civil servants. The next chapter elaborate on this by discussing how the city managers divide their time and to which activities and actors they pay attention to.

Chapter 5

How city managers allocate attention

5.1 A day in the life as a city manager

I watched city managers in their everyday office life. I relied on what they said and did. I looked for patterns and focused on meanings. As these observations suggest, there is no such thing as a typical working day representing the various activities during the week of a city manager. If there is a typical day, it has many meetings with different purposes, actors and unexpected turns. The day described is in that way neither typical nor unusual. It is a composition of the data from the observation weeks, it is therefore based on true events. The goal of this description is to give detailed account of a day in the life as a city manager. I describe different appointments that happened in the observation weeks and therefore use data from each case. In that way I give an overview of the various meetings. Therefore the day covers meetings with political office holders, organisational members as well as external partners. It is filled with bilateral and collective meetings, in and outside the municipality. It might err on the side of fully booked because there is an evening meeting described.

Day overview

- 8.30** Executive Assistant
- 9.00** Works council meeting
- 9.30** Bilateral manager
- 10.00** Introductory meeting external organisation
- 11.00** Secretary of the management team
- 12.00** Civil servants and alderman
- 13.30** Introductory meeting external organisation
- 14.00** Extra executive board meeting
- 15.00** Bilateral team leader
- 16.00** Bilateral team leader
- 19.30** Information evening city council

8.30 I arrive at the municipality office building and upon entering I see that the CM is already in his office, taking a phone call. In the meantime the executive assistant and I wait outside the room. It is my first observation day, so I am pretty excited about what events will come up. Eight minutes later than planned, the executive assistant enters the CM's office. The office is unrelentingly modern. A meeting table is placed in the middle of the office. I think it is remarkable that the office does not contain a desk or computer. The office is relatively empty and decorated by a bookcase, painting, plant

and whiteboard. It is time for the weekly meeting. The conversation starts informal, however the conversation changes pretty fast towards the daily business. The correctness of planned appointments is being discussed. The CM looks at his iPad and gives instructions, while the executive assistant is taking notes. The executive assistant will arrange this. At the end of the meeting the city manager shares with the executive assistant what the phone call was about. It gives me the impression that the city manager is still processing the phone call in his mind.

At **9.00** the next appointment comes up. This is a meeting with the works council. At the beginning of the meeting the city manager informs the two men know that he should have sent an email and starts typing on his iPad. Coffee and tea are on the table; both men make themselves comfortable; each pours himself a cup. The city manager opens the conversation and different themes are passing the table. These themes are called "*current events*". During this meeting I have the feeling that the members of the works council are really aware of my presence in the room. They seem to be a bit uncomfortable with the situation, because they both look at me several times. After 30 minutes the city manager ends the conversation. The meeting is finished with positive words such as "*thank you, super, great*". After the meeting the city manager walks out of the office and goes to the executive assistant to check whether the appointments have been changed.

9.30 The next appointment starts. This takes place with two managers from the management team of the municipality. I notice that the city manager takes a different role than before. He wants to get a lot of information instead of giving instructions. After getting enough information the city manager starts giving advice how to deal with each of the topics. At the end of the meeting one of the managers asks the city manager if he can have some more time. The city manager says "*of course*" and the other manager leaves the room. The manager poses short question to the city manager. The exact purpose of the question is not clear to me. I notice that I was lost in my thoughts for a moment. Around **10.00** an introductory conversation with an external organisation takes place. The conversation contains different general topics. The city manager and the two women speak about work in an executive board and pay attention to tensions of discussions at the meeting table and tensions of gender differences in a board. Moreover, they discuss the craft of an alderman and the social status of this profession. The conversation continues on difficulties of being a director of an organisation. Especially the work pressure of a CEO is discussed. The meeting has a different purpose as the ones before; it is a network meeting in which they share thoughts. They finish with "*it was nice meeting you*" and exchange business cards.

11.00 The administrative secretary of the management team enters. The main goal of this appointment is to prepare the management team meeting. Furthermore, the city manager gives feedback on policy papers. This feedback concerns the strength of argumentation in the paper and completeness of

information. He also makes a connection towards the executive board and asks the secretary if it would be good to connect the executive board to the topic. Moreover, the city manager gives advice on what parts of the policy papers should not be brought into the meeting already and for what reason. The secretary of the executive board is aware of my presence. During the meeting she sometimes explains to me what the topic is about. I try to make myself small: I am supposed to be a ‘fly on the wall’, not a constant presence in the conversation. At the end of the meeting the city manager shares the information from the phone call this morning with the secretary. Around **11.35** the executive assistant of the city manager enters the room and brings some papers, which need to be signed. The city manager looks quickly through the papers and signs. The conversation ends informally with some short updates about Easter break coming up.

12.00 Before the next meeting begins, the city manager explains to me that he arranged this meeting to bring some civil servants and an alderman together to talk about a certain topic. He has the feeling that this conversation needs to be arranged, so the organisation and the executive board can find each other on this topic again. We walk to the executive board meeting room. The CM opens the meeting and explains why he organized it. During the meeting someone comes in and brings lunch. I think it is interesting that this meeting is set up within an informal lunch setting, since the content of the meeting is to discuss an important issue and to reach a solution acceptable to all. The alderman explains his opinion and talks a lot. The civil servants mostly react to this. During the conversation the CM interferes and explains that he really wants to make some steps forward and that it should not be a conversation in which everyone is just saying “yes”. At the end the city manager gives some advice and based on this an action plan is made. He ends the conversation and checks whether everyone is satisfied with the solution. I notice that it is really interesting to see how the city manager wants to connect the civil service and the aldermen. For me this meeting illustrated the pivotal role the city manager has.

The city manager walks back to his office. **13.30** a new external meeting takes place. The meeting has been arranged on request of the external organisation. The organisation offers to have a helping hand dealing with the inflow of the refugees. They discuss several options and the city manager takes notes. Around **14.10** an extra meeting with the executive board has been arranged. This meeting is in the executive board meeting room. The meeting has been organized because a letter from the ministry arrived. The letter concerns a message from the minister about a current administrative theme that became a public issue for the municipality. Therefore the strategy of the board in this case needs to be discussed. I am aware of the fact that it is a complicated situation and an important meeting for the board. However, I also notice that I like the excitement of an unexpected turn and a complicated situation. The mayor has not been able to attend the meeting; one of the aldermen presides. The city manager mainly listens to what the aldermen discuss. The executive board discusses in what way the

aldermen can deal with the letter. One of the aldermen asks if the city manager can make a phone call for them. The meeting ends with a clear plan about what the next steps in the coming days. Some of the aldermen leave the room pretty fast. The city manager and two aldermen have a short chat after the meeting. While they are collecting their papers, they talk about several actual topics and share their opinions.

15.05 A team leader enters the office to discuss the options for an ICT system to save and exchange files. The city manager and the team leader discuss several aspects such as costs and communication towards the executive board. The team leader sometimes asks advice from the city manager on how to deal with the next steps. The meeting is shorter than expected. From **15.30** to **16.00** the city manager has some time to spare. He spends this time in his office and uses it to read some letters and papers at his desk. At **16.05** the last appointment – a team leader - of the day enters his office, belatedly. Managing issues within her team are discussed. While telling her story I notice that the woman is looking at me quite often. I realize that she is conveying personal information and therefore I am careful with my note-taking. The city manager asks a lot of questions to obtain more information how everything is going in the team and the broader organisation. The team leader introduces new topics and wants to know whether the city manager is open to her new ideas. The city manager explains what he thinks about the topic and to what extent it has a connection with the executive board's vision. At **17.00** o'clock their bilateral meeting ends.

The city manager goes home, but the working day resumes a few hours later when a regional information evening for the city council starts, at **19.30**. The topic of the evening is the decentralisation reforms within the social policy domain. The city council members of the four municipalities involved in the social domain cooperation join the evening meeting. The information evening takes place outside the municipality at a different location. The aldermen of the social domain portfolio start the presentation and provide updates about the developments of the past half-year. The city manager sits in the room and listens to the presentation. He does not have an active role during the information evening. After the presentation it is time for discussion in smaller groups. Employees of the executive organisation in the social domain lead the discussion in the smaller groups. They share their working experiences or dilemma's and city council members ask questions and share their opinions. The city manager joins some of the groups, but does not actively participate. For me it is really interesting to see how important the social domain has become for the municipalities and the ways in which the executive board shares its view on the implications of these developments with the city council. I also notice that I am tired after a day of shadowing and therefore it is difficult to still make some interesting observation notes. At **22.00**, the discussion rounds are finished and the meeting ends with some drinks and informal conversations. The city manager does not participate; at **22.05** he leaves the building. It is time to go home.

The composition of the observation data shows how interesting the observation weeks have been to me. A lot of different actors, appointments and situations took place. I had the opportunity to attend all meetings. In that way I have obtained a close-up and personal impression about the working life of the three city managers. However, this is only one day of the life as a city manager. The next paragraph therefore elaborates on how much time a city manager spends on the various activities. It provides insight in a year of the life as a city manager by explaining the time allocation and attention of CMs.

5.2 A year of the life as a city manager

This paragraph provides insight in how city managers allocate their time by means of a diary analysis. For each of the three CMs selected for this study, 12 months' worth of diary entries have been collected and content-analysed. Two diaries have been analysed for the whole of 2015. CM3 started in June 2015 at his current position and consequently his diary has been analysed from June 2015 until the first week of May 2016. The various activities of the CMs have been broken down into the categories: *up* (1); *down* (2) and *out* (3) (see paragraph 3.3.3 Diary analysis). Furthermore, three other categories are made, namely *social* (4), *travel* (5) and *other* (6) (see paragraph 3.3.3 Diary analysis).

Caveat

Before the findings of the diary analysis are discussed, it should be said that the diary analysis is based on appointments recorded in the diary. However, the city managers' working days also consist of other activities like reading documents and papers, answering mails, phone calls and preparing meetings or presentations not recorded in the diary. This should be taken into account while reading this chapter. I therefore also asked the city managers what they do beside the appointments hours. The CMs 1 and 2 explained that their weeks are fully booked with appointments. They therefore mostly prepare papers and agendas during the weekend and evenings. CM1 and CM2 mentioned that they do not want to spend more time than necessary on operational work e.g. reading papers and preparing meetings. They therefore try to manage these working hours efficiently. Moreover, CM1 mentions that he is always reachable by phone for aldermen or colleagues. All three reported taking and making phone calls in the evenings as a recurrent phenomenon in their typical working week. CM3 liked to read academic and consultancy papers about their profession (public sector managerial work) during evenings. CM2 in contrast reported having enough time to complete his work-related activities during office hours, thus including time to prepare executive board meeting and to read policy documents. The CMs also spend time managing their diary and their electronic in-boxes. All three deemed it important to respond quickly to questions by email.

5.3 Case one

Every Monday morning the CM1 and the executive assistant have a short meeting. In this meeting, they run through the week schedule and CM1 has the opportunity to (re-)prioritize pending appointments. Furthermore, the diary does not show the changes of appointments during a working week. CM1's schedule is a moveable feast. As the executive assistant explained *"I cannot say that the schedule for next week will stay the same as it is right now. That is rarely the case"* (Int. 6). Appointments are also planned on an ad hoc basis, depending what issues happen to be salient during any given week. Table 3 provides an overview of CM1's working hours recorded in the diary.

Activities	Total hours	Weekly hours	Percentage of total
Up	302,5	6,71	20,90%
Political office holders collective	239	5,3	16,5%
Political office holder individual	63,5	1,41	4,4%
Down	610	13,54	42,2%
Direct report	415	9,22	28,7%
Ex. Assistant	17	0,37	1,2%
Others	178	3,95	12,3%
Out	284,50	6,32	19,6%
Network local	55	1,22	3,8%
Network regional	196	4,36	13,5%
Network national	33,50	0,74	2,3%
Social	53	1,17	3,7%
Travel	82,50	1,83	5,7%
Other	117	2,6	8,1%
Total	1449,5	32,17	100%

N = 45

Table 3

CM1's 2015 diary featured 1449,5 working hours in 45 weeks (excluding holidays). This means that on average the city manager spends 32 hours per week on several meetings. Among them there are weeks that the CM has meetings for up to 46 hours, but also weeks when the diary is filled with 22 hours of appointments. The executive assistant mentions that the CM has a fully booked diary (see table 3). As she explained, *"I sometimes tried to save a free half hour on a workday. But then someone comes in and the city manager mostly says that's okay just tell my executive assistant to confirm the meeting"* (Int. 6). The CM confirms this. He explained that he has some moments during the week that he wants to have time for his family. For instance, the Wednesday afternoon and Fridays are more often free from appointments. Furthermore, the diary analysis shows that the CM is mostly free or has

fewer appointments during school holidays like Christmas, Spring, Summer and Autumn break. Figure 7 provides an overview of the workload on each category.

Activities of the year 2015

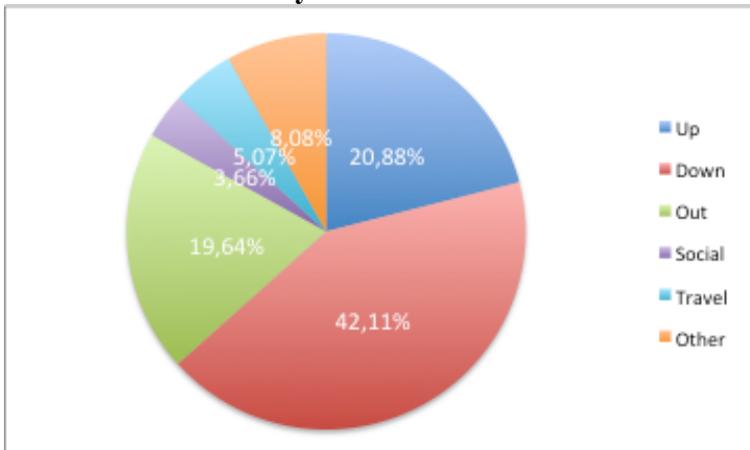


Figure 7

Up, down and out

As shown in the figure above the CM spends twice as much time on category *down* than on *up* and *out*. This means that the CM is quite busy with managing the organisation. This is interesting to see, because both the CM and the executive assistant think that the city manager is spending more and more time outside the organisation. As CM1 said *“The first 3,5 years I did a lot of work inside the organisation, after 3 years I thought it was time to take one step back. The past years I am more busy with “playing outside” the organization”* (Int. 1).

The CM spends 16% of her time on meetings with the executive board in a collective setting. This takes mostly place on Tuesday. Only 4% of the time is spent on individual board member meetings. This is a weekly half hour meeting with the mayor to prepare the collective meeting and once in a while an update meeting with an alderman. However, one of the aldermen mentions that the aldermen and the CM are working on the same floor. This means that they walk into each other’s office often during a working week. *“So you often have a short conversation. This can be something informal about soccer matches, but it is also used to give feedback or to brainstorm together”* (Int. 7). This means that not all time spent with the mayor and aldermen is represented in the diary.

When looking more closely at CM1’s management role, it becomes clear that he mainly fills his time with meetings with colleagues that directly report to him. Direct report encompasses the management team members and two employees who have a supporting function. 12,3% of his time is filled with meetings with others. These are for example, the works council or the HRM department.

In 2015 the CM spent 20% of his working days outside the organisation in different networks. This is mostly in regional networks. The regional activities focus on cooperation with different municipalities in the social domain, a city manager’s network and social innovation. Local activities mainly concern visits to local partners or meetings with executives of organisations. The CM is also part of a national board where his national activities are spent. Travel time takes about around 2 hours a week. It is not a surprising amount of time since most of the appointments take place inside the organisation or in the region. Although the CM is regarded as an open and social person, he is not frequently active in social activities like drinks, lunches or dinners. Lastly, 8% is filled with other activities. These are private appointments, interviews or meetings that could not be placed in one of the former categories.

To summarize, the diary shows that the city manager has a full week with different appointments. The changes in appointments due to ad hoc cases and dynamics of a working week are not visible in the diary. The CM has a full schedule, but can manage his time by trying to keep Wednesday afternoon and Fridays free. Moreover, the CM has less or no appointments during school holidays. Although the CM is increasingly active in different networks most of his time is still spent on the management of the organisation. The diary contains a lot of appointments with the management team and supportive staff. The CM is mostly active in regional networks in comparison to local or national networks. The executive board of the municipality asks less of his time than managing the organisation. However, a lot of informal and short brainstorm meetings are not represented in the diary.

5.4 Case two

The executive assistant explained that the city manager operates more independently than other executive board members. As the executive assistant mentioned, *“The city manager works independently, he manages his own mailbox and sends a message forward when I need to plan an appointment for him. I rarely get phone calls or emails for him”* (Int. 11). Every Monday the city manager and the executive assistant have a meeting. In this meeting, they run through the next three weeks planning of the diary. This is a short meeting according to the executive assistant. She mentions that she is usually outside the room in 10 minutes, because CM2 knows exactly what his schedule for the coming weeks is. It is a short meeting where CM2 informs her to arrange some tasks. Table 4 provides an overview of CM2’s working hours recorded in the diary.

Activities	Total hours	Weekly hours	Percentage of total
Up	266	6,55	34%
Political office holders collective		211	5,4
Political office holder individual		55	1,35
Down	214	5,28	27%

Direct report	130,5	3,22	16%
Ex. Assistant	2,5	0,06	0%
Out	245	6,05	31%
Network local	14	0,34	2%
Network regional	228	5,62	29%
Network national	0	0	0%
Social	8	0,2	1%
Travel	6	0,15	1%
Other	57	1,4	7%
Total	796	20	100%

N = 40 (excluding holidays & Furlough)

Table 4

CM2's diary featured 796 working hours in 40 weeks (excluding holidays and furlough). This is an average of 20 working hours per week. However, there were weeks when the city manager had appointments up to 33 hours and weeks when the diary recorded nine hours. This is mostly due to furlough hours during some of the weeks. In total CM2 had five weeks of holiday over the year. As the CM explains about his working weeks *"I have made the choice to work with a direction model. This gives me some rest and space. The work pressure is on the first days of the week"* (Int. 8). Furthermore, CM2 works at home on Monday and Thursday morning. Moreover, he explains that when a task needs to be done within limited period of time he helps with writing or preparing a meeting. CM2 mentions, *"For example with the organisation development, that is something Human Resources normally writes and prepares. However, there was limited time so I took up the task"* (Int. 8). Figure 8 provides an overview of the workload on each category.

Activities of the year 2015

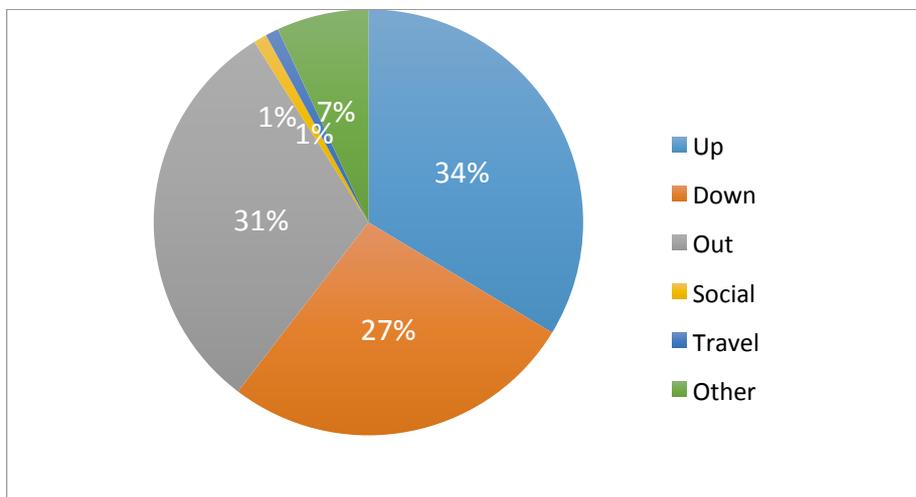


Figure 8

Up, down and out

As shown in the figure above the city manager spent almost an equal amount of time on each of the categories. Less time was spent in the category down. The CM is less involved in the management of the organisation. Instead the director of operations focuses on management of the organisation. However, the CM explained that he still is in touch with the organisation by the weekly management team meeting. Furthermore, the CM and the director of operations have a weekly meeting. In this way he has contact lines to the organisation.

The biggest amount of time is spent with political office holders. An important appointment in this category concerns the weekly executive board meeting. 7% of the city manager's time is spent on individual meetings with political office holders e.g. the weekly meeting with the mayor. In this meeting the mayor and city manager speak about developments within the organisation and the policy and political developments. The mayor argues, *"But this does not mean that we reserve all matters or announcements for the Monday meeting. If something important happens, we can always quickly walk into each other's office"* (Int. 10). Appointments with aldermen are rarely recorded in the diary. However, one of the aldermen elaborated that he and the CM have frequent contacts about his portfolio of the social domain.

The CM focuses on organisation development. He is less operationally involved, so he does not conduct bilateral meetings with team leaders on a regular basis. He is in touch with the organisation by the weekly management team meeting. This meeting takes place following the executive board meeting. CM2 explained, *"After the executive board meeting I report about the decisions from the board. This report is electronically available for employees. In the afternoon I explain the decision making towards the management team"* (Int. 8). Furthermore, the weekly meeting with the executive assistant is not recorded in the diary of 2015. The city manager spent 10% of his time with other people inside the organisation.

The CM is active in regional networks. 29% of his time focuses on working with regional networks. An important network structure within this is the cooperation of four municipalities. The CM is actively involved in the cooperation within the social domain. He started with the cooperation of the executive agency. Currently, the CM is involved in the whole field of the social domain. Other regional networks concern current topics e.g. the reorganisation of the municipalities, the earthquake dossier and a city manager network.

Travel is not recorded in the diary. Therefore the diary analysis does not provide a good overview about the traveling hours. Also social activities were not recorded in the diary. This category is

represented with 1% of the city managers time. Finally, the category of other activities takes 7% of the city managers time.

To summarize, it is interesting to note that CM2's the diary is less filled with appointments. The work pressure is in the beginning of the week. Fridays are mostly used to prepare executive board meetings. Furthermore, the CM conducts operational work e.g. managing his email box and planning appointments himself. The CM is operationally involved as the manager of the social domain team. Furthermore, it became clear that the CM spent most of his time with political office holders and in a variety of regional networks.

5.5 Case three

The executive assistant mentioned that she manages the diary of the city manager. Employees come to her to make appointments and the city manager asks her support when he wants to arrange an appointment. CM3 and the executive assistant do not have a weekly meeting. Contact takes place by email and throughout the week there are several contact moments. Table 5 gives an overview of the recorded working hours.

Activities	Total hours	Weekly hours	Percentage of total
Up	333	8,3	24,26%
Political office holders collective	277,5	6,9	20,2%
Political office holder individual	55,5	1,4	4,0%
Down	457	11,4	33,23%
Direct report		6,93	20,2%
Ex. Assistant	0,5	0,01	0%
Others		4,5	13%
Out	254	6,4	18,49%
Network local		1,22	3,2%
Network regional	196	4,9	13,5%
Network national	33,50	0,84	1,7%
Social	63	1,6	4,6%
Travel	69	1,7	5,0%
Other	198	5	14,4%
Total	1374	34,41	100%

Table 5

In total the city manager has 1374 working hours in 40 weeks. This is excluding holidays and three weeks of May since the city manager took office in June 2015. I obtained the diary overview from then until the first week of May 2016. The CM has 34 hours filled with appointments on a weekly basis. In some weeks the appointments counted to 42 hours, where other weeks the CM had 27 hours of appointments. The city manager leaves the office earlier on Monday to spend time with his family. The other days of the week are fully booked. The CM mentioned that he enjoys the combination of regular and flexible meetings. The executive assistant confirms this *“I sometimes ask whether it is not too much for him. Then he has about 12 meetings on a day and I think wow. But he is new in his profession and really likes a lot of things to do”* (Int. 16). Figure 9 gives an overview of the workload on each category.

Activities of the year 2015

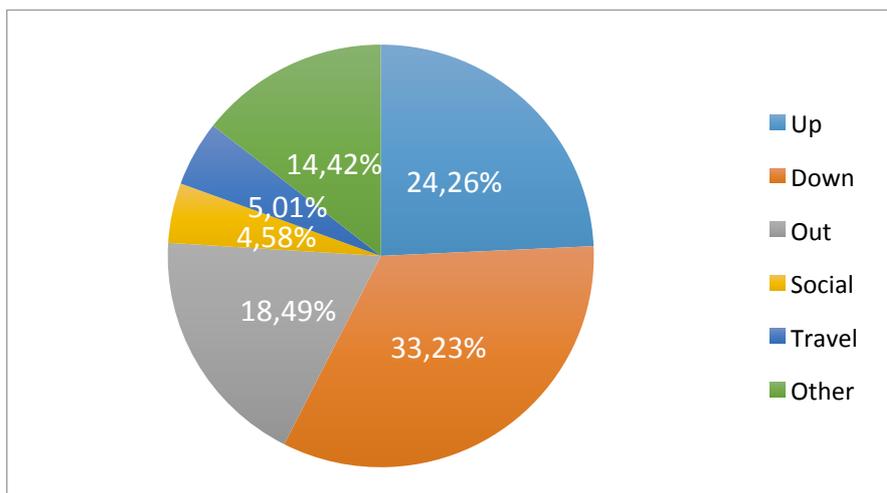


Figure 9

Up, down and out

20,2% of CM3's time is spent with political office holders in a collective setting. The executive board meeting takes place every Tuesday until 1pm. However, the whole day is reserved for the executive board. In the afternoon, updates about larger projects for the municipality are presented and discussed or meetings with external partners take place. During the week bilateral meetings with the aldermen and a weekly meeting with the mayor take place. This takes 4% of his time. In the bilateral meeting, the mayor and CM prepare discussion points for the executive board meeting and check whether the information for the executive board meeting is complete.

The CM spent most of his time in the category down. CM3 spent 20,2% with the management team in a collective setting. On Wednesday morning the management team meeting takes place. This meeting

concerns organisation wide issues and operations. There are no recorded appointments with the executive assistant. 10% of the CM's time is spent with others in the organisation. He explained, "*That is something I explicitly do. I do not want to spend more time in my office than necessary. So when I have some free time between meetings, I walk through the organisation*" (Int. 15).

The CM spent most of his time (13,5%) in regional networks against 1,7% in national networks and 3,2% in local networks. Regional network tasks are for example being part of the city managers network group and being a president of an administrative knowledge network. The CM acknowledges the importance of connecting outside the organisation in networks. During his introduction period in the municipality the CM had external appointments. He elaborated that this combination worked out well for him. In this way CM3 tries to collect information and feedback from different partners about the work and services of the municipality.

The CM spent 4,6% of his time on social activities. These encompass farewell meetings, lunches or dinners. Travel takes about 5% of CM3's time, which is on average one and a half hour a week. Sometimes CM3 travel time was coded with biking or walking. Most of the appointments take place in local or regional networks. The last category *other* contains a different range of appointments. The diary shows that 14,4% of the city manager's time is spent on a variety of activities. These are private appointments, interviews with people or meetings that did not fit within one of the categories. The executive assistant mentioned, "*He likes a lot of things, he is full of energy and committed everywhere*" (Int. 16).

To summarize, the diary shows that the CM has a full week with different appointments. He has the most working hours recorded in the diary on a weekly basis. The CM manages his time by trying to keep Monday afternoon and Fridays free from appointments. Moreover, the CM has less or no appointments during school holidays. He spent most time on the management of the organisation. The CM is mostly active in regional networks comparing to local or national networks..

5.6 Patterns of attention

Rhythms of the week

The diaries show that the working week of a CM is structured along multiple practices that establish a weekly rhythm. As Rhodes et al. (2007) mention everyday practices are often described as routines. It is governed by rules and underpins the standardisation of service delivery. In that way routines make the complex world seem manageable. The permanent meetings can be regarded as routines for the CMs and form the weekly rhythm. These include the executive board meeting, the management team meeting and the bilateral meetings with the executive assistant, the mayor and secretary of the

director/management team. In addition the CMs have mostly a fortnightly meeting with individual management team members and a monthly meeting with the mayor and council clerk.

Their week schedule is based on these regular and flexible appointments. The Monday is mainly used for bilateral meetings with the mayor and the managers. Tuesdays are spent with the executive board members. CM2 uses Tuesday afternoons for the management team meeting. The other two city managers have Tuesday afternoon reserved for the executive board. They both use the Wednesday mornings to report about the information from the executive board. The management team meetings are planned on different days at the two other cases, namely Wednesday and Thursday. Moreover, the Wednesday and Thursday afternoon are more flexible for the CMs. On Fridays the CMs usually have less meetings and mainly use this day to spend time in networks. CM1 mentions, *“Yes sure. There are some fixed patterns during the week. But despite that my executive assistant would say it is quite unpredictable, because my diary planning is different every week”* (Int. 1).

The CM’s week also consists of other cyclical practices. An important one is the continuing cycle of getting papers from the organization to the executive board. Moreover, these papers are forwarded to council committees and to the plenary city council. All these stages set deadlines for submission. Another rhythmic cycle which a CM is part of is the mid-term review of the executive board and the internal planning & control cycle. Lastly, there is the cycle of political elections every four years.

When we compare the three diaries, it becomes clear that though each CM pays attention to the three categories *up*, *down* and *out*, they do so to different extent (see Figure 10).

Overview activities of the year 2015

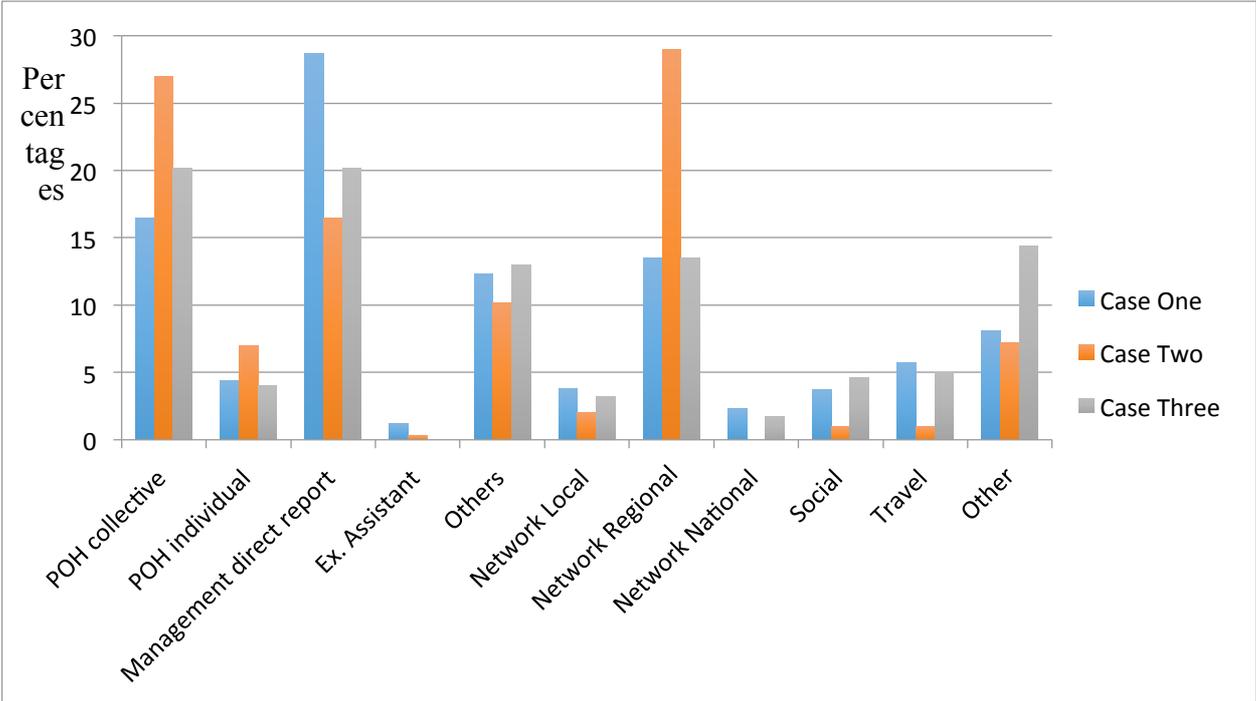


Figure 10

CM1 and CM3 spent about 21% of their time on appointments with political office holders. CM2 spent 34% of his time in the category *up*. Moreover, CM1 and CM3 spent 20% of their working time in networks, while CM2 is more actively involved in networks (31%). Whereas CM1 spent 42% of his time on managing the organisation, CM2 and CM3 respectively spent 33% and 27%. All diaries show that the CMs spend only around 1% of their time with the executive assistants. However, besides the officially planned meeting once a week, they have several contact moments. These are generally short conversations regarding questions and updates about the diary. There are also differences in the amount of time spent on the categories *social*, *travel* and *other* activities. This is due to the facts that in CM2's diary traveling hours are not recorded. The category *social* is mostly a small part of the city managers work, around 1% to 5%. This may also be due to that not all social events have been recorded in the diaries. Moreover, the category *other* contained activities such as interviews, but also activities that did not fit within the former categories. Therefore, the difference within this category also depends on the clarity of the purpose and participants of the appointments noted the diaries.

Allocating attention: strategies or circumstances?

As the diary analysis displays CM1 and CM3 spend an equal amount of time in the category *up* and *out*. CM2 spends more time with political office holders and in external networks. Moreover, CM1 is most active in the category *down*. Why do CMs divide their time in a certain way?

When I asked the city manager and other participants why the CM spends his or her time in a certain way, different answers came up. First of all, the participants elaborated that societal developments ask for certain priorities the CM needs to work on. For example, a mayor explained that a couple of developments take place within the external environment where it is essential for the city manager to participate. One of the executive assistants mentions, *"It is remarkable to me that the diary contains many "hot items". So it differs every time. Like last year with the start of the social domain, a lot of appointments needed to be planned around the social domain theme"* (Int. 6).

When focusing on external circumstances of the three cases, it becomes clear that CM2 operates within a different organisation structure and context than CM1 and CM3. The director of operations is involved in the management of the organisation. Instead the CM has more time to focus on policy and regional cooperation. In line with this, the CM works for more than nine years in the municipality. In the start of his career he focused on the development of the organisation and quality of services. Currently, the organisation is in control and the CM can focus on external processes. Furthermore, the CM works in a small municipality. The CM argues that the decentralization of tasks and responsibilities in the social domain asks for cooperation between small municipalities. As he mentions, *"We noticed that this has a great impact on our organisation. We are a small organisation and came to the conclusion that we needed other municipalities to manage the social domain"* (Int. 8).

CM1 and CM3 work in an organisational structure where the CM is actively involved in the executive board and the management of the organisation. These organisations do not have other directors for internal processes. Moreover, the CMs work in larger municipalities and have relatively less years of working experiences in the organisation. This plays a role in how they divide their time. CM1 has worked in the organisation for 5 years. The CM started more recently to focus on cooperation with a neighbouring municipality. The CM is therefore strategically involved in the organisation development. CM3 works for about one year at the municipality and focuses on internal processes. CM3 explained that a lot of things take place inside the organisation on a daily basis. These issues of the day play a dominant role in his job. CM3 elaborates, *“If you are well-known in the organisation and know how everything works, you can give yourself more space to play outside”* (Int. 15). Therefore circumstances e.g. organisation structure, size and tenure of CM and external developments play a role in how the three CMs divide their time.

Second, participants explained that it is also a personal choice of the city manager to pay attention to certain tasks. For example, the council clerk argues that it is a choice of CM2 to operate more intensively within external networks. As he mentions, *“Well you can also say, we are going to do this in another way. We choose to take a project leader who will be active within the social domain and directly reports to the city manager* (Int. 14). In line with this, CM1 elaborated that in the first 3,5 years of his job he was mainly internally oriented. He argued, *“that was a very conscious choice”* (Int. 1). This means that CMs have different beliefs and strategies in their allocation of time.

CM2 spends most time with political office holders and in external networks. Two strategies play a role. First of all, the CM argues that he feels the pressure to leave the organisation once routines have developed. Therefore he sees new operations such as the decentralisation of *the social domain* as opportunities. He mentions, *“If the social domain development would not have taken place, I would have left this place”* (Int. 8). The CM enjoys working on new operations. Second, the CM wants to stay in control. He mentions that decision-making was a challenge in the previous organisation structure. The CM operated with five department leaders, which could lead towards on-going discussions. In the current organisation structure the CM and director of operations form a direction team and are in control by their hierarchical position. CM2 elaborated that team leaders now think, *“If they decided this, we will do it that way”* (Int. 8). Moreover, the organisation structure gives the CM enough space to be involved in the external environment. In that way the CM can contribute to large political dossiers such as the reorganisation of the municipalities and the social domain. Being externally involved to work on regional issues gives the CM a sphere of influence. The CM explained that he is strategically involved in these political dossiers.

CM1 and CM3 spend most time on managing the organisation, but they focus on different tasks. CM1 has many strategic management team meetings on the development of the organisation in collaboration with a neighbouring municipality. The CM believes it is important to play a central role in this development, because the risk exists that the collaboration would not lead to enough benefits for the organisation. Therefore the CM wants to stay in control within this development. The CM mentions that he has a clear direction for the organisation in mind. CM3 mentions that it is important to him to be accessible in the organisation. His strategy is to create connection within different departments of the organisation. He explains that he has an open and accessible agenda. This means that policy advisors or team leaders can easily make appointments with him. Although this leads to many appointments according to the CM it has positive effects. It is also a manner to stay in control. It gives the CM enough information about organisational developments and issues. In that way the CM can keep an overview on what is happening in the organisation. And he explains that in these conversations the CM can exchange his thoughts and expectations to organisational members. As he said, "*the benefits are twofold*" (Int. 15).

In line with the findings previous studies argue that allocation of time is based on personal beliefs and values and external circumstances. The Garbage Can model of choice explains how managers make decisions (Cohen, March & Olsen, 1972). To understand decisions one can view a choice opportunity as a garbage can into which participants dump various problems and solutions. According to them a decision is an outcome or interpretation of several relatively independent streams within an organisation. There are four independent streams: problems, solutions, participants and choice opportunities. Problems may be concerns of civil servants, group relations, societal issues or political debates or scandals. Solutions are answers on questions and issues in organisational problem solving. Participants are actors in the municipality like civil servants and political office holders. A choice opportunity is a situation in which the CM is expected to take a decision. For example when contracts must be signed, people are hired, promoted or fired or responsibilities need to be allocated between divisions (Cohen, March & Olsen, 1972, p. 3). In addition, March and Olsen (1979) assert that the distribution of attention can be interpreted in terms of three themes. First, it can be regarded as a rational action, based on outcomes about gains and costs. Second, attention is the outcome of symbols of attention distribution. Here the cultural beliefs about what and who is important play an important role. Third, they describe attention as an obligation, the relevance of duty, restriction and routine. This means that managers ask themselves: what are my alternatives? What are my values? What are the consequences of my alternatives for my values?

This theory helps to understand the findings of the study. As explained by the Garbage Can choice model CMs have to deal with problems, solutions, participants and choice opportunities. In that way, the environment plays a role in the decisions on paying attention to certain tasks. In addition, the

model shows that CMs also make choices on their personal beliefs and values. By these two ways the CMs set priorities in their attention patterns. For instance, as discussed in the previous paragraphs, CM2 explains that the developments in the social domain have great effect on the small organisation. This can be seen as a problem. One solution for him in this case is to collaborate with three other municipalities and to become actively involved in this network. This decision is also made based on his beliefs. The CM sees new developments as opportunities to become involved in and the CM can strategically influence these opportunities by his involvement. In that way the CM also exercise control.

5,7 Attention profiles

Noordegraaf (2000, p. 229) developed different attention profiles for public managers. He concluded that different types of *public managers' attention profiles* exist: these managers have different maps, orientations, diaries and role conceptions. He developed three types of attention profiles: *public advisory, public process and public organization managers* (2000, p. 234). These attention profiles influence the central orientation of a public manager. Two of the attention profiles suit the allocation of time of the three CMs: public advisory manager and the public organisational manager. The third attention profile is not represented in the allocation of time of the CMs. *A public process manager* feels responsible for the smooth running of issues streams. They have a tendency to value processes and have a facilitating and stimulating role. They focus on information streams. However, the diary analysis did not display the CMs as a process manager. This may be due to the fact that the allocation of time in the categories up, down and out cannot disclose whether the CMs have a process orientation.

Public advisory manager - First of all, Noordegraaf (2000) describes the *public advisory manager*. These public managers deal with policy issues. They have more or less clear ideas about which issues are important and how such issues must be substantiated. These public managers want to add value to their policy field. He describes that these managers are more “busy” public managers. They make long hours, they attend many meetings and they interact with numerous others. Mostly these managers deal with big issues, these issues have well known labels or agenda items.

All CMs spend time on operating with political office holders. CMs attend executive board meetings, have bilateral meetings with mayor and aldermen and attend city council meetings. The CMs mention that they enjoy working in this political context. CM3 argues, “*The political side is public. It gives the job a different dimension. It is sometimes illogic. I like that part*” (Int. 15). However, CM2 spends allocates most attention on public advisory managers activities. The CM is working on big dossiers, such as the social domain and the reorganisation of the municipalities. Within these dossiers the CM interacts with different partners like the executive portfolio holders of four municipalities.

Furthermore, CM2 has fixed issue meetings and agenda items. Although the CM spends most time in managing up, it does not have the most recorded meetings. This finding does not perfectly fit in *public advisory manager profile* as described by Noordegraaf (2000).

Public organisational manager - Noordegraaf's (2000) second profile concerns the *public organization manager* whose prime concern lies with managing the organisation. They feel it is their responsibility to develop the organisational infrastructure. These managers have stronger emphasis on managerial values. Their working days are the most unpredictable and these managers are least busy. It consists of bilateral meetings in their office, organisational papers and issues. These public managers are also more internally oriented and have an organizational agenda.

Although each CM is involved in managing down, CM1 spends most of his time in the category *down*. One of the biggest organisational development tasks for the CM is the collaboration with the neighbouring municipality. The city manager is involved in the strategic development of the organisation. Also, CM3 is more concerned with the organisation than political officer holders. Moreover, the city manager spent relatively most time with other actors in the organisation (13%). This means that the CM has a lot of internal bilateral meetings. The diary analysis shows that CM1 and CM3 spend most time on managing down. However, the CMs both have long working days and a lot of different meetings during the week. Therefore this finding does not perfectly fit with the finding of Noordegraaf (2000) that these managers would have a less dynamic and busy working week. CM2 spends less time on managing down than CM 1 and 3. But he mentions that it is important to be involved in managing the organisation to a certain extent. He does chairing the management team meeting and has a bilateral meeting with the director of operations to receive updates. He also focuses on the strategic development of the organisation. But he is less involved in managerial tasks and has almost no bilateral meetings with managers and other civil servants.

Public collaborative manager - The diary analysis displays that there is another important category for CMs. The city managers all spend time in different networks, between 18 and 31 percent. Although each CM has a collaborative attention profile there are variations to what extent and how they operate as a collaborative manager. CM2 spends most time (about 30%) in networks comparing to the other cases. The CM collaborates with three other municipalities in policy domains and organisational subjects e.g. Human Resources and ICT. Therefore the CM has a lot of regional meetings with these four municipalities. CM1 and CM3 spend about 20% of their time in networks. Also, this mostly concerns regional and local networks. CM1 collaborates in a regional network of youth care policy. In this network seven municipalities cooperate together on this policy domain. The CM became part of a national network for city managers recently. Although CM3 spends equal amount of time in networks the CM is involved in different types of networks: the CM is not actively involved in networks in *the*

social domain policies and the CM3 does not collaborate in the organisation with other municipalities like CM1 and CM2 do. CM3 is the president of a regional administrative knowledge network and part of a regional network group for city managers. Moreover, the CM has more bilateral networking meetings with executive of external organisations. Within these networks it is about creating connection, stimulation of different initiatives and organizing information streams. This finding can be related to recent publications in which networking plays an important role.

Brookes & Grint (2010) have been researching public leadership in the changing context of public administration. They described this as a form of collaborative leadership in which public bodies and agencies collaborate in achieving a shared vision based on shared aims and values. In this way public leaders seek to promote influence and deliver improved public value within a complex and changing society. In line with Brookes & Grint’s finding, also The Dutch Senior Civil Service (2015) reported in their latest vision on public leadership that it is important to be a *collaborative leader*. A *collaborative leader* aims at leaders who are working in a broader context and not just only in the “own domain”. Therefore collaborative leaders actively search for cooperation and co-creation. Collaborative leadership has increasingly become important due to societal developments. Therefore public managers should focus on cooperation and connection with society. Networking and managing relevant information is a crucial. Moreover, leaders have to focus on the development of their employees to develop skills to operate in these networks. Collaborative leadership therefore is about the ability to create initiatives in networks (coalitions and alliances), with the purpose of achieving societal goals. This asks for a collaborative manager who can operate in different contexts and is able to connect these different contexts. Teamwork, attention to complementarity and carefully listening to each other is important. Therefore this study finds the *public collaborative manager* as an additional attention profile to the three attention profiles of Noordegraaf (2000).

Noordegraaf (2000) provided an overview of the three attention profiles. Figure 10 adds the attention profile of the fourth type, the collaborative public manager, to the three existing ones (next page).

Figure 11 Attention profiles of public managers

	Public Advisory manager	Public process manager	Public organization manager	Public collaborative manager
Actor	Multilateral meetings, policy meetings	Field meetings, conferences	Bilateral meetings	Network meetings, conferences
Attendance	Urgent mails, policy	Policy papers	Organizational	Policy &

	papers		papers	Organizational papers
Actor Attention	Policy	Policy, Organisation	Organisation	Policy, Organisation
Issue Attention Bigness Heat	High High	Medium Medium	Low Low	Medium Medium
Mental Map	Policy agenda Civil guide	Procedural agenda Process servant	Organizational agenda Reorganizer	Collaborative agenda Connector
Work Conditions Ambiguity	Reduction by substantive conviction	Reduction by political instruction insights	Reduction by management insight	Reduction by collaborative insights

Figure 11

To conclude, this chapter shows that each of the three city managers divide their time in a distinctive fashion. Their pattern of attention is based on contextual circumstances such as the organisation structure and size, tenure of the city manager and external developments like decentralisation of tasks in *the social domain*. Moreover, CM's have personal beliefs and strategies to deal with the external environment. For example, CM2 sees external developments as new opportunities and is strategically involved in policy issues to exercise control. CM3 connects with the organisation to obtain an overview and to share his thoughts and requirements in the organisation. CM1 experience the organisation development as an important matter to control the benefits of the collaboration project for the organisation.

These beliefs and strategies of the city managers lead to a different combination of public manager attention profiles. All CMs pay attention to managing *up*, *down* and *out*. However, CM2 deals most with policy issues and wants to add public value to the policy field. He has a lot of well-known labels or agenda items about current policy issues like the social domain and reorganisation of municipalities. CM1 and CM3 spend most of the time in the category 'down'. CM1 and CM3 are internally orientated, have more managerial values and have bilateral meetings. Moreover, CM1 is strategically oriented by managerial meetings on the development of collaboration with a neighbouring municipality. Furthermore, this study found an additional attention profile: the public

collaborative manager. CMs pay attention to networking in a different extent, but work all a broader context than the organisation. They connect with municipalities and partners.

Notwithstanding these differences, the diary analysis shows that *all* CMs spend a significant amount of time in each of the categories. The analysis shows that CMs have hybrid attention profiles, they pay attention to political, organisational and collaborative activities. Therefore this study found that the public managerial profiles by Noordegraaf (2000) could be used simultaneously. In contrast with the finding of Noordegraaf the three CMs have to allocate their attention in three categories and therefore did fit in each public manager profile to a certain extent. Therefore this study shows that there is no *one best fit* for a CM in an attention profile in these three cases. The question rises whether this finding of these three cases may apply for other public managers.

Although this chapter provides insight in the allocation of time of city managers, it still remains unclear what roles and practices the city managers perform. Therefore the next chapter elaborates on the roles and practices of the CMs. Moreover, it discusses in what way the CMs perform these roles: their styles of working.

Chapter 6

Roles and styles

I observed city managers at work. I looked for what roles and practices the CMs had to perform in their everyday life and I conducted interviews about the tasks and roles of the city managers. The fieldwork discloses that the city manager performs three main roles. City managers are a chief advisor for political officeholders, the CEO of the organisation and a connector. This chapter describes the practices of city managers through which they perform their roles. It therefore firstly answers the sub-question: What roles do city managers take and perform? Furthermore, it elaborates about in what way the city managers perform their roles. It therefore also describes the city manager's styles of working. This part answers the sub-question: How do city managers perform these roles?

6.1 Chief advisor

As a secretary of the executive board the city manager performs a non-partisan advisory role. Being a professional advisor for the executive board is materializes during the executive board meetings on Tuesdays. These meetings contain situations in which the CM can act e.g. when an alderman has to deal with a difficult case and wants to know the view of the city manager. Participants explained that the CMs share their views to improve the board's discussion. In that way the professional role does not solely focus on only fulfilling the board's wishes. As an alderman explained, *"During an executive board meeting the city manager can say if you choose that direction, you should realize that it will cost a lot of effort from the civil service or it will be expensive. However, the city manager would not say you should do it or not. It is up to the aldermen to decide"* (Int. 19). As the aldermen mentioned the CMs support them by providing relevant input from the organisation. Moreover, the CMs secure whether the demands of the board can be realised by the organisation. Therefore an interest of the city managers is the capacity of the organisation during the executive board meetings.

CM1 explained that political sensitivity of dossiers plays a role in how CMs act as advisors. As he mentions, *"It depends on how political sensitive a dossier is how much time you spend on it. If it is a sensitive topic I usually spend more time on preparing the topic"* (Int. 1). In addition one of the mayors argued that there is a great situational component in the advisor role. This depends on what an executive board needs and how the city manager can contribute to this. As he explains, from work experiences within different executive boards, sometimes the aldermen are new and need more support. However, there are also situations in which the aldermen can manage cases more independently.

Furthermore, the professional advisor role is also performed during the week. When aldermen have a certain problem they can always ask the CM for help. The CMs are supportive by making time for brainstorm sessions and think along for solutions. The city manager's offices are closely located to the aldermen offices and therefore they are accessible and easy to address.

Institutional memory

As a professional advisor the city manager has an "institutional memory". Especially in case two participants explained the knowledge keeper function of the city manager for the board. Participants mentioned that the CM is a stable and continuous factor in the executive board. The CM can in that way guarantee some continuity for the organisation. The turnover rate of employees is relatively low, but the executive board changes every four years, given the regular elections. In that respect you have to deal with many types and styles of aldermen. The CM needs to anticipate on that. Moreover, the CM has to support the new executive board members. They may not always exactly know the state of affairs. As one of the alderman told, *"I am in office for about two years. There are still things that seem illogical to me. In that respect it is very useful to work with a city manager who has six or seven years of working experience and can tell you more about the context"* (Int. 12).

In addition, the aldermen explained that it is important to them that the CMs prevent them from making mistakes. The CMs can do so by explaining what consequences certain decisions may have. For example, what the price tag will be for the organisation, when something may not be possible in the constitutional law or what kind of questions the city council may have. As one of the aldermen said about the role of the city manager, *"so he sometimes touches on score points that we did not see"* (Int. 12). Also the mayors see the CMs operate in such a way. They emphasize the importance of a warning signal from the CM. This warning signal for example contains whether the aldermen also took other aspects for decision-making into account. So, CMs have an institutional memory, can guarantee continuity and give strategically advice based on the knowledge about state of affairs. Although most studies argue that the CM has a vulnerable position in the executive board. Mayor and aldermen have hierarchical power and therefore CMs (as civil servants) are without support of mayor and aldermen powerless (Grotens, 2015). This finding shows that CMs have a certain degree of power by their institutional memory. They know state of affairs and have good organisational knowledge which aldermen and mayor relay on.

The executive board meetings grant exclusive attendance to a select few members of the organisation. Throughout the interviews, I noticed that civil servants do not know what role their CM takes and performs within the executive board meetings. Some participants told that they have formed impressions based on how they know the city manager. But as this quote nicely summarizes, *"That is*

the secret of the executive board, an internal matter. That is the privacy of the executive board meeting room” (Int. 9).

Sparring partner

The mayors and aldermen see the CM as a sparring partner for them. As the mayors and aldermen explained this role is mainly played between meetings. They mostly quickly walk into each other’s office to ask each other’s opinions and thoughts on issues. According to one of the mayors, sometimes these short brainstorm sessions only take two minutes. As a sparring partner the CM can be seen as an informer, consultant or mentor. A lot of information streams come together in the function of the CM. The CM therefore knows a lot about processes and ‘hot’ topics. In that way the city manager is seen as a good informant.

In addition, the CM acts as a sparring partner on a wide range of topics. The council clerk said, *“We discuss things such as, did you also hear that? What would that mean for our collaboration?”* (Int. 14). He explained that they discuss hot topics, mostly related to political developments around them. During these sparring sessions, they sometimes also speculate about possible directions, because political situations are more often unpredictable. In line with this one of the mayors elaborated that for him it is important that the city manager also gives feedback on his way of working. He explains that it is more common that the mayor reflects on the city manager’s work. But for him this should also be the other way around. Therefore he sometimes asks the CM to reflect on his way of working.

The sparring process is reciprocal: most of the actors experienced that the city manager also comes to them to ask their opinions. As one of the managers mentioned *“I mostly have some small questions and points I would like to discuss. But the city manager has questions as well, so it happens from both sides”* (Int. 17).

The tandem: city manager and mayor

It is Monday morning and time for the bilateral meeting between the city manager and the mayor. The CM walks into the office of the mayor. The room is classically furnished. The city manager and mayor sit down at a round table. The mayor starts the conversation. The CM also brought a small black notebook. During their conversation the CM take notes. The conversation touches upon several topics. It starts with an actuality of the new alderman. The mayor explains his opinion on this and the CM reacts to the mayor’s thoughts. Then the mayor starts to talk about a workshop that will be organised for the city council members. After the updates of the mayor, the CM elaborates about the management team meeting. He explains the developments of the management team and explains what happened last week. Then, they discuss a political salient dossier: refugees. Both men share their opinions on the topic. They exchange their impressions and ideas. It is interesting to see that they

mostly agree about their ideas. The meeting is informative as well as a way to check each other's opinions and thoughts on hot topics. The mayor sometimes asks for more information on a certain topic and the city manager elaborates. At the end of the conversation the mayor asks the CM to arrange something for him, it contains an email request. The CM answers that he will do this.

Participants likened the mayor and city manager to a double act, a tandem, they both want to reach unity in the executive board. The aldermen are politicians and want to accomplish things that they believe are good for society. However, aldermen do not always have the same beliefs. Therefore good discussions need to take place, in which every alderman can contribute equally. Moreover, it is important that the executive board operates in a united way. Here is a role for the CM and the mayor to arrange this. As CM3 elaborated, *"It is about how you arrange that every alderman get the chance to participate during the board meeting"* (Int. 15).

All mayors emphasized that the CM needs to be someone who they can trust and rely on. They should feel comfortable enough to expose their vulnerabilities in the relationship with the CM. The mayors expect the CM to support them and provide honest feedback on how things are going in the executive board. One of the mayors explained that there is a safe basis in the relation between him and the city manager. As he said, *"Our cooperation is intense therefore you have to blindly trust each other"* (Int. 10).

In all three cases the CMs and mayors had a weekly appointment in which they shortly prepared the executive board meeting together. For example, in these meetings they discuss what dossiers will lead to more discussion or tensions in the board. One of the mayors explained this as a short testing moment in which you receive a second opinion on your first thoughts. He argues that this is also something that fits within the northern culture. Political office holders from the north prefer to test thoughts and strategies in a bilateral way before it is presented in a board meeting. They do not prefer to confront things in a collective setting. Moreover, the tandem is by some participants also seen as a strategic bond. One of the council clerks argues, *"They get along very well. I have the idea that they try to persuade the direction of the executive board in which they would like to see it"* (Int. 19). Participants elaborate that it is visible in the way mayor and CM operate and the comments they make towards each other. They have a shared approach and try to steer the executive board in a way of working within this approach. It is an interesting finding that CMs strategically operate with mayors. Previous studies argue that CMs behold the political game but formally are no player in this (Grotens, 2015, p. 16). However, this finding shows that in practice CMs are involved in the political practices by preparations of meetings, bilateral conversations and their tandem relation as a strategic bond.

6.2. CEO of the organisation

It is Wednesday, 9.10am. The city manager and the managers of the organisation walk up to a white board, which reads “the start of the week”. The CM looks at the white board and starts to discuss the notes on the board. One of the managers wants to discuss a financial topic. A discussion between two managers begins. After a few minutes the city manager explains that he will further elaborate on the situation during the meeting, so that he wants to end the discussion for now. After the updates everyone takes a seat at the meeting table. The CM sits at the head of the table and introduces the agenda points. Managers react to each other and do not always agree on their opinions. The CM listens to these discussions and takes the lead when necessary. He often summarizes what has been said at the table and what the next steps will be. The CM also asks a lot of questions to get information from the managers. He mostly asks whether everyone is fine with a certain direction “Okay, shall we do it that way?” or he says, “It is okay like this?”. It is visible that the city manager leads the meeting and tries to connect the information from the managers. After the different subjects have been discussed the CM ends the meeting.

Chairing the management team

Participants explained that the city managers are organisational leaders of and through the management team. This is seen as one of the main tasks of the CM. In this way the city managers are the supervisor of department managers or team leaders. Once a week in the management team meeting, organisational topics and issues are being discussed. According to one of the managers it is about how they organise the mission of the political office holders in a smart and effective way. As she mentioned, “Everyone is responsible for his or her own department. But as a management team you also have a shared responsibility for the operations of the organisation” (Int.17). As the head of the management team the CM has the final responsibility for the operations of the organisation. The CM therefore tries to connect the management team members, make sure they coordinate their actions and work through any tensions that might occur between them or their departments.

Although CM2 is also the head of the management team meeting, he is less involved in the operational part of the organisation. He therefore is not the supervisor of the management team members. The city manager mentioned that it is important for him to know the issues in the organisation and therefore has a weekly meeting with the director of operations. In that way he obtains information about what is happening in the organisation.

Council clerks and members explained that they know the city manager is an organisational leader, but how the city managers operate and what they exactly do is not clear to them. The city council members and the council clerks only notice with a certain distance what the city manager does as a

CEO of the organisation. For example, one of the council clerks mentioned, *“What I know about the organisation comes from the monthly meeting for the organisation. I always read the report, because I do not take part in the meeting”* (Int. 18).

Building capacity

The CMs explained that they focus on management development. CM1 mentioned that preparing the management team meetings and being the chairman during the meetings is an ongoing concern. However, he believes it is important to also spend time on management development. It is important to connect the development of the management team to the organisation. Also CM2 explained that he invests much time in management team development. The management development days take also place outside the municipality building. As one of the mayors explained, *“Last time it took place in a small church. It is about leaving the city hall, the daily routine and in that way you cannot get interrupted”* (Int. 10).

External trainers such as coaches or consultancy organisations support the city managers with management development. CM1 explains that in the beginning, the development of the management team focused on getting fundamental processes done. Later, change management, communication and feedback became important themes. One of the department managers mentioned, *“It is about learning to speak one language, speaking one language to employees and managing the organisation in a collective way”* (Int. 3). CM2 explained that the days with the management team are moments where you can reflect on how it is going with the organisation, the team leaders and the management team itself. They city managers think it is important to have a good relationship in the management team. However, as CM2 said it should not lead to soft and friendly get-togethers. It is still important that the management team can be critical to each other. In a good relationship people should be able to say what is on their minds. This is something that can be challenging, but is important for the quality of the management team meetings.

Present and accessible?

The CMs believe it is important to connect with employees in the organisation. The CMs have their office doors open when they are not in meetings. Moreover, they believe it is of importance to be transparent to the organisation and share enough information with employees. For instance, CM2 took pride in telling me that his door is always open and everyone could come in so to speak. He recounted the surprise among staff when early in his tenure it became clear that he actually did keep his door open and was always approachable by staff. But as the CM told it is not a problem when people want to ask questions. Moreover, he also thinks it is important to connect with employees. For example, he goes into the organisation to have conversations with the different teams. CM3 explained, *“When*

someone leaves the room and closes the door, I always open it again. And on top of that try to be in this room no more than necessary” (Int 15).

Participants explained that they have informal and short contact moments during the week. One of the managers elaborated that she speaks often with the city manager. This contact takes place in bilateral meetings and when it is necessary to discuss something with each other. As she said *“For example, we just had a short meeting where I explained my question. In these conversations the city manager thinks along, so I can take the next steps”* (Int. 3). Also other moments during the week are used for contact moments. For example, one of the managers elaborated that she and the CM use the city council meeting to email with each other. They both do not have a formal role in the city council meeting. Then she sometimes asks questions, like what do you think about this issue or the city manager responds such as we need to do something about that. We then shortly discuss the daily routines by email.

However, participants also experience barriers in contacting the city managers. The city managers have busy schedules, attend many meeting and their offices are closer located to the executive board member’s offices. In addition, one of the executive assistants told that she experienced that for some civil servants it can be a barrier to enter “corridors of power”. According to her this is something that arose in the past, however she still experiences that this creates a distance between the city manager and organisation. Subsequently, another executive assistant explains that she is conscious of what questions can be asked to the city manager. The idea of ‘bothering’ the city manager with irrelevant information is at stake for her. Although the city managers believe it is important to be open and stay in contact with the organisation, actors also experience these barriers that may limit their openness.

Strategic perspective

I am sitting in the back of the city council chamber. Employees are entering the chamber gradually. Around noon the room is full of people. The city manager stands in the centre of the chamber. A big screen is behind him and he is holding a microphone. It becomes quiet in the room and the city manager starts to speak. It is time for the monthly presentation about the developments in the organisation. This monthly event is called, the viewing. A variety of subjects are presented by the city manager. Think of developments about the quality of services, digitalization, citizen participation and collaboration with citizens. The city manager has a clear voice and speaks in a calm way. I notice that the city manager knows exactly what story he wants to present to the organisation. One of the employees asks a question to the city manager. She explains that she understands the vision of focusing on collaboration with citizens, but this is not easy in practice. She mentions a situation that happened last week. The city manager responds that he understands the situation and elaborates on the topic. He explains that it therefore is important for the employees to use the education facilities.

The woman does shortly respond after the explanation of the city manager. Furthermore, during the presentation the city manager mentions that an organisation is never “done”. There is always room for improvement. In addition, he shows a book about this topic and explains to the people that it is an interesting and good book to read during the holidays. An employee jokes whether the city manager has shares in the book. People start to laugh. The city manager laughs too. Then he responds that without joking he really enjoyed reading the book, it gave him some new insights about organisations and thought it may be interesting for others to read it too. Besides these remarks the employees are quiet. After one hour everyone leaves the room, the presentation is finished. I experienced it as a clear story with examples and personal thoughts. When the city manager reacted to the two remarks he showed understanding for the comments of the employees. But he also elaborated on the topic and in that way tried to connect the employees to his story.

As illustrated by the fragment it is important that the CM has a strategic perspective on the organisation for the coming years. Participants mentioned that the CMs are focusing on the development of the organisation and have a perspective on the direction of the organisation for the coming years. They described that this is also something CMs need to focus on as part of their job. The executive assistant of CM1 mentioned that there is always something the city manager has thought about and wants to set up. The executive assistant explained that the CM always has his sights set on the future. Also the council clerk explains that the CM has a clear vision. He relates this to societal developments. According to the council clerk *“He is someone with a clear vision on the direction of the municipality. So for example, he focuses on the change to become a municipality that supports citizens to participate. I have the idea that the city manager is working on that very well”* (Int 4). CM2 is experienced as someone with a clear and direct vision on the organisation. The city manager is open about his perspective to the organisation. The director of operations mentions, *“The organisation and executive board know which direction the city manager wants to take and what things are or are not important to him”* (Int. 9). A manager of the third case argues that she noticed it is important for a CM to create a strategic perspective about what the organisation should look like. The manager believes that the city manager has a great vision on this.

The challenges of visioning

Being strategic and focusing on the organisation vision is not always easy for the city managers. CM3 mentions that the issues of the day can distract him from the bigger picture. There are a lot of topical issues and processes the CM is involved in. These can make it challenging to focus on the long-term issues. GM1 explained that he strategically works on the development of the cooperation with the neighbouring municipality. However, he explained at the same time it is still important to also focus on the organisation development of her organisation. CM1 mentioned that there are some challenges

for the organisation coming up, however the CM did not discover what these challenges are exactly and the direction of the organisation within these yet.

Acting upon new visions can prove challenging, too. CM1 explains that changes sometimes come incredibly fast. According to the city manager this can be really complicated for employees. Some people are working for many years in public administration and public organisations are traditionally organized. CM3 also experiences challenges in implementing the organisation vision in the organisation. He emphasizes the importance of training and education for employees. According to him *“We are going to realize it with the current organisation. It is a challenge to change the ways of working to increase participation in society. I mean we are not that flat modern organisation, but something of that attitude is expected from us. That is a big challenge”* (Int. 15). The CM explained that an organisation is never completed and therefore the development is a continuing process

Participants see CM1 as a real director for the organisation. As the mayor explains, the city manager has to have a certain distance to the desk where papers are produced. In addition, the executive assistant emphasizes that the CM delegates tasks. She explains that there are city managers who want to stay in control by doing most tasks themselves. However, CM1 pushes operational tasks away if it should not necessarily be done by her. According to the mayor this is different in smaller municipalities. In these municipalities the city managers can be described as a cooperative foreman. In addition, the council clerk believes that it is not possible for a CM to be a cooperative foreman. As he mentioned *“In today’s society a city manager cannot be first among equals anymore. You should be able to lead the whole organisation”* (Int. 4).

Likewise, CM3 has a support structure around him that allows him to maintain a strategic view. For example, the CM does not need to write the report of the executive board meeting himself. This report is used to communicate the information from the meeting to the organisation. The mayor explained that the CM delegates operational work down the line organisation. According to him this is also possible because of the size of the municipality. In smaller municipalities these delegated processes are less easy to run. Also the executive assistant explains that a lot of people come to her to make an appointment with the city manager. Moreover she said, *“I can decide to make appointments myself, that is not something I discuss with him all the time. He is very open, so I mostly know what kind of people want to make an appointment. He only needs to accept the appointment request by email”* (Int. 16).

In contrast, CM2 does a lot of operational work himself. He is seen as someone who wants to be in control. The executive assistant explained that she can imagine why the city manager does this. She explained that you, as a city manager do not have to deal with easy subjects. As she said, *“therefore it*

may be challenging to push tasks away” (Int. 11). On the other hand, the CM also does smaller tasks himself such as managing his mailbox or printing papers. The director of operations explained, “I said to the city manager, your email box is insane. I would do that differently. However, the city manager wants to have different sources of information” (Int. 9). The director of operations further elaborated that a director can be compared with a broker in communications. A lot of information is coming to you, you should be able to quickly analyse the information and push the task or question forward to the right people. In line with the mayor of case one, he explained that this may be due to the size of an organisation. In a smaller organisation all work related issues are directly coming to you, because there are not that many hierarchical layers.

6.3 Connector

The term ‘connection’ popped up again and again during my fieldwork. Almost every participant stressed that the city manager is a connector. The city manager plays this role in four different settings: between the executive board and organisation, political office holders, departments of the organisation, different municipalities and with local partners.

It is Wednesday, 10 AM. The report about the executive board meeting to the management team starts. The report takes place in a big room and around 15 people are present. The chairman of the meeting gives the city manager the floor. The city manager elaborates on the documented report. This documented report is one page and consists of around ten points. The city manager elaborates on the points and shortly explains how the discussion of the board meeting was. Sometimes he explicitly tells how a certain alderman thinks, this makes the story more expressive. The city manager tells to one of the team leaders that he will elaborate on one of the points to him. He explains that he does not want to share it in this setting, but that it is something that should be arranged soon. After the list, the manager also gives a short report about how the Tuesday afternoon with the board was. He makes a small joke and looks at me “Right, Nicole?”. We all start to laugh. Around 10.25 one of the managers gives a report about the management team meeting. The CM complements the story. Then the CM explains that he needs to leave for the next appointment. One of the managers shortly asks something about a paper that should be ready for the next executive board meeting. At 10.35 the CM leaves the room. A team leader follows the CM and the CM starts to explain what happens in the board meeting. He explains how he looks at the situation and tells what his next steps the coming week will be.

Pivot between executive board and organisation

The CMs operate at the intersection of the executive board and the organisation. They need to create a connection between what happens at administrative department and in the organisation. The administrative part is public and political. The organisation part is internal and official. As one of the

managers said, *“you are the boss of the municipality and participate in the executive board. That game should strategically be played by the city manager”* (Int. 17).

The city managers advise and support the executive board and translate the ambition of the board to the organisation. The CMs explained that this is something they really enjoy working on. As CM3 mentioned, *“I really like these two elements. I often speak with people who ask me, what do you think of the political and executive part? It is public and it gives the job a different dimension”* (Int. 15). Further, as one of the mayors mentioned a municipality is not a company. It is a different kind of organisation. This means that employees can be really committed and have the best ideas, however the board can think totally differently and can throw the idea away. The CM needs to have a certain feeling to create connection in the organisation about how the executive board thinks and operates. Moreover, this can be different every four years and the CM should be able to anticipate on this.

The CMs have a weekly meeting in which they update the organisation about what aspects were discussed and decided in the executive board meeting. In this way the city managers translate the board ambitions to the organisation. The CMs also share a documented summary of the executive board meeting. One of the CMs does this on Tuesday afternoon directly after the executive board meeting. The other two city managers do this on Wednesday morning. It is interesting to notice that the city managers deal with this in their own way. For example, CM2 reports the decision list of the meeting during the management team meeting. This meeting takes place with the director of operations and the team leaders. CM1 shares information from the executive board outside the management team meeting. She reports to the management team (department managers) as well as the team leaders. CM3 organizes a weekly report outside the management team meeting to which everyone is invited to come. Mostly civil servants who worked on the papers for the executive board and the managers take part in the report. CM1 and CM3 explicitly explained that it is important to not only give a factual report. They therefore explain to the organisation how discussions took place and for what reasons decisions have been made, for example, what were the critical notes on the policy paper or how did the aldermen read it. One of the managers explained that for her these snapshots of the mood of the meeting help in understanding how the aldermen look at a certain topic. As she mentioned, *“When we know how the aldermen think of certain topics. It really helps us with taking the further steps in the advising process”* (Int. 3). In addition the manager also told that not all topics or tension in the board are shared during the weekly report. She noticed that the city manager choose consciously what information could be shared. Therefore in some cases additional information is shared during the management team meeting. CM3 elaborated that he believes it helps his colleagues in their jobs to obtain information about how the board reacts.

Exercising quality control

In addition the city manager also has a formal responsibility for the quality of the policy papers for the executive board. The city managers guarantee the quality of the papers differently. CM2 mentioned that he has a consultation with the board that he does not read all the papers in advance. He believes that the team leaders and the aldermen can manage the quality of the papers themselves. Therefore they also do not discuss the content of policy papers during the management team meetings. The portfolio meetings on Monday are the basis for the aldermen and civil servants to interact. In contrast, CM3 explained that he sees all papers before they are presented to the executive board. However, he spends not too much time on this. As he said, *“I do not read the papers on every detail”* (Int. 15). CM1 explains that the dynamic of the political discussion on a certain dossier sometimes forces her to be more involved in the development of policy papers. However, like CM2, she does not read all the papers in advance. CM1 believes it is important that the organisation can work independently. Therefore she does not want to control this process too much. In the three cases the city managers give the aldermen and the civil servants a lot of freedom to work on policy papers. Therefore in general their pivotal role is limited on this specific task.

Steward of the politics-administration interface

The city manager also needs to balance the ambitions of the executive board. It is important that the city managers take the capacity of the organisation into account during decision-making processes. This means that the CMs have to ask critical questions and create connection with the organisation. The aldermen can have great ideas, but this can only be realized if they organisation can manage it. One of the managers described this an important “buffer” for the organisation. As the manager explained, *“When politicians say something you have to estimate what this means in practice for the organisation. The city manager should not just say yes or now, but sometimes he also has to investigate what is possible”* (Int. 17).

In line with this, executive board members and managers stressed the importance of the CM staying in contact with both the organisation and the executive board. A CM needs to be part of the board and has to advise and support mayor and aldermen. But, at the same time a CM has to be part of the organisation too. Therefore a city manager has to know how processes are going and what kind of developments take place in the organisation. Therefore a CM needs to be committed to both tasks leading the organisation and advising the executive board. Friction can occur if a city manager does not manage this relation well. The different actors around the CMs gave labels for the pivotal role of the city managers. For example, they saw the CM as a balancer, a bridge-builder or, again, a connector. One of the mayors explained that if you want to operate successfully within the board it is important to also successfully operate in the organisation. Without the organisation city managers

cannot support the board. As he mentioned, *“The city manager needs to balance between the two, you cannot see this apart from each other”* (Int. 10).

The CM also fulfils a pivotal role when there is an issue between aldermen and civil servants. One of the aldermen said, when she recognizes that something is not smoothly working she goes to the city manager and discusses it. She explained that an alderman is not responsible for the performances of the civil servants. Therefore, when things are not smoothly working the city manager is in the position to help. In addition, one of the managers explained that there were some problems in the way one of the aldermen reported the content of the portfolio meetings to the executive board. The manager shares information with the CM when she has the feeling that an alderman is actually not content with a certain direction from the portfolio meeting. Moreover, the CMs bring the executive board and organisation together during the year. As the director of operations said, *“We have an year planning in which four times a year we discuss with the board what the focus will be. This is a board portfolio meeting with the complete management team and the executive board members”* (Int. 9). In this meeting they critically discuss what tasks need to be realised in the amount of time left. An alderman of the third case explained that during the mid-term review they critically discuss what the ambitions for the next two years are. As the alderman mentioned, *“In these meetings the city manager and the management team play an important role. They need to give substantiated input from the organisation on which the aldermen can deliberately decide what the focus will be”* (Int. 19).

Facilitating political teamwork

It is around 10.30. The mayor introduces a new theme in the board meeting. One of the aldermen remarks that he believes a civil servant is not working on this dossier correctly. The alderman thinks it has something to do with the interest of the civil servant. The CM reacts on the argumentation of the alderman. The other board members are quiet. The CM finished by telling that the situation will be investigated. The mayor quickly introduces another topic. However, the city manager and the alderman are still whispering to each other. They city manager asks “do you really believe that is the case?” The alderman says, “yes, yes, yes”. The CM responds that he is not sure and that it needs to be further investigated. At this moment I am not sure what is going on emotionally. I only have the feeling that whispered words mean more than I could notice yet. After the meeting the CM further explains to me that the CM has the feeling that the mayor and the aldermen do not share the same vision on the topic. Therefore he will arrange bilateral meetings with each of the actors to further investigate what is at stake.

The vignette illustrates that the CM is also a connector to political office holders. The CMs have a meaningful role in creating a shared vision on how the executive board should operate together. One of the aldermen recognizes that the city manager can counterbalance tensions in the board. The

aldermen have their own interest, which can lead to tensions. The CM is not politically involved in this and can therefore manage these tensions. As the aldermen said, *“The city manager can counteract the group of aldermen who also have their own interest. Of course, sometimes tensions occur, like political games”* (Int. 19).

Facilitating coordination

Moreover, the CM is a connector for the management team. A municipality consists of several policy domains and services. However, participants mentioned the importance for civil servants to work from a shared vision. To successfully operate in complex policy issues collaboration between teams and domains is mostly necessarily. Participants explained that the city manager is a connector between the different domains. The CM does so by managing the organisation from a holistic perspective. According to one of the managers *“In general the city manager has the overview and that is also the focus in the management team meeting. Yes, the city manager is strategic”* (Int. 3). CM3 explained that the management team consists of different types of personalities. This gives an extra dynamic at the meeting table. The city manager experiences this as something positive to create good discussions. However, it can also be a struggle in the cooperation sometimes, when the same kind of dynamic situations too often occur. The team members can be annoyed by the patterns that repeat themselves constantly. The city manager sees it as his role to focus on these dynamics. He therefore tries to connect the managers and to create a shared management vision. Moreover, it is important that the managers operate in an integral way. As one of the city managers said, *“We have six division managers and so six divisions. It is a challenge every time to get the divisions to realize the puzzles and issues in an integral way”* (Int. 15). It is interesting to find that participants see the connector role also taking place within the executive board and within the management team. Whereas previous studies describe the connector role mostly as a social connector in networks and as a pivotal role between executive board and organisation (Arts, Bouwens, Dubbelman & Ten Wolde, 2015; Grotens, 2015), this study found that the city manager fulfils this role also *within* each administrative and organisational side. In that way city managers facilitate political teamwork and coordination in the organisation.

Ambassador and networker

Municipalities increasingly become part of a broad network structure. Especially in smaller municipalities connection via cooperation plays a great role. A city manager of a neighbouring municipality explained that a lot of initiatives come from the city managers. However, they always have to connect the executive board to their initiatives. He compared this to a wheelbarrow. The city managers are the ones who push the wheelbarrow further. However, at any time executives can put a stone in front of the wheelbarrow. If executives are not connected to the initiatives from city managers in networks, the wheelbarrow will be stuck. The metaphor illustrates how important connection with

executives in external networks is. Moreover, the city managers play an essential role in coordinating these external networks. The coordination focuses on how to divide regional tasks between the municipalities, how to bring policy teams together or how to communicate between the different organisations. The city managers are responsible for the cooperation processes. In this respect, many meetings with managers and executives of the municipalities take place in which the city managers have the role to connect these different stakeholders. A city council member elaborated *“We are organizing it with different municipalities. Therefore processes need to be managed. Who is responsible for what? What is our role in the cooperation? This should be coordinated between the municipalities. That is an essential for the city manager, coordination with other municipalities”* (Int. 13). The city manager also connects with local partners. In this way the city manager can scan and interpret the environment. Local partners provide information about how they see the municipality operating as well as what is important in the environment.

The data discloses that the CMs perform three roles. CMs are the secretary of the executive board in this part of their craft they perform a non-partisan advisor role. This role is materializes mostly during executive board meetings. Also, CMs are supportive for mayor and aldermen by making time for brainstorm sessions and think along for solutions during the week. They are sparring partner on a wide range of topics. In the non-partisan advisor role CMs have an institutional memory, the CM is stable and continuous factor in the executive board. Moreover, CM and the mayor are likened to a double act, a tandem. They want to reach unity in the executive board. They perform this role in the administrative sub-sphere described by ‘t Hart (2014). Administrative leaders concern officials who feed political executives with sound and usable information and advice. They have access to political decision-makers and the opportunity to ‘manage up’. Moreover, ‘t Hart (2014) argues that administrative leaders need to make policy work at the front line of implementation and building organisational capacity to accomplish this. They need organisations that enable them to create public value. This part of administrative leadership is performed by city managers in their role as the CEO of the organisation. CMs chairing the management team. They have to supervise the department managers and team leaders. They focus on building capacity by investing time and effort in management development. CMs want to be present and accessible in the organisation.

‘t Hart (2014) mentions that administrative leaders need to build, consolidate, safeguard and transform public organisations in the face of ever-changing environment. Indeed, CMs have to develop a strategic perspective for the organisation, as directors they focus visioning the future of the organisation. However, the extent of distance to the desk where papers are produced differs for the CMs. Two of the CMs have a support structure around them to maintain a strategic view, however one of them performs also operationally tasks.

Lastly, CMs are connectors. They perform this role by different practices. They have to exercise quality control. The CMs guarantee the quality of papers of the organisation and they operate as a steward of the politics-administration interface. They have to manage their relations with both executive board and the organisation. They have to act when tensions between aldermen and civil servants occur and have to balance the ambitions and wishes of political office holders. As ‘t Hart (2014) argues administrative leaders are not merely required to serve the government of the day, but also to protect the administrative process. Balancing this at any time, but particular when they are directly at odds with one another, is perhaps the supreme test of administrative leadership.

Moreover, as ‘t Hart (2014) argues it is important not to be naïve about the sub-spheres of public leadership. Although political, administrative and civic leadership denote institutionally and analytically separate spheres of action in reality they are often intertwined. Also, CMs have to operate within different sub-sphere. The current study found that Municipalities increasingly become part of a broad network structure. The city managers are an ambassador and networker. Especially in smaller municipalities connection via cooperation plays a great role. CMs play an essential role in coordinating these external networks and have to connect executives in these initiatives. CMs also connect with local partners, which contribute to interpret and scan the environment. Interacting with partners contribute to reflect on municipality operations. In this respect CMs act within the civil leadership sphere. Civic leaders bring societal needs, wants and ideas to the political stage. They critically monitor political establishments; they contribute by drawing attention to strengths and weaknesses. Sometimes they work in tandem with government (‘t `Hart, 2014). Lastly, as top-level civil servants CMs cannot completely avoid taking part in political leadership processes, if only because of their strategic advice to the political office holders. As CMs explains political sensitivity of dossiers plays a role in how CMs act as advisors. If it is a sensitive topic CMs usually spend more time on preparing the issue and supporting the aldermen. Figure 12 provides an overview of the roles and practices of the three CMs.

Roles	Chief Advisor	CEO of the organisation	Connector
Practices	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Non-partisan advisor in executive board 2. Institutional memory 3. Sparring partner 4. The tandem 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Chairing the management team 2. Building capacity 3. Present and accessible 4. Strategic perspective 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The pivot 2. Exercising quality control 3. Steward of the political-administrative interface 4. Facilitation political teamwork 5. Facilitating coordination 6. Ambassador and networker

Figure 12

6.4 Role conceptions

Each city manager elaborated on his role conception. CM1 mentions that the craft of a city manager is the untimely position to be involved in political and organisational developments. According to him it is about stimulating the executive board to make progressions. Therefore the CM believes it is important to be involved in the executive board discussions. He emphasises the importance of sharing his thoughts and reflecting on processes in the executive board. The CM elaborated that connection between the expectations of the executive board and the organization is something a CM needs to do. Moreover, the CM focuses on strengthening the organisation. Therefore the CM worked on organisational cuts, organisational development and collaboration with a neighbouring municipality. The CM further elaborates that the past years he also started to play outside. He explains that it is good to take a step back from the internal processes and to get new impressions on the organisation from interacting within the external environment.

CM2 mentions that a city manager should work on a good relation with the organisation and the executive board. In the advisor role political office holders will appreciate you when a CM uses his historical knowledge about the state of affairs. And shares his knowledge about the organisation. However, a CM should not decide what directions to go that is something political office holders do. In contract, he explains as an organisational director you have to take decisions. After discussion in the management team, the CM is the person to decide what direction to take. Further, the CM sees new developments as challenges within his craft that are important for him to focus on. Therefore currently, the CM is external oriented in cooperation in the social domain.

CM3 sees two central elements in a CM's role: the administrative and organisation side. It is about managing the organisation, focusing on organisational processes and being the first advisor of the executive board. The political and administrative part is less predictable. It is public and gives sometimes illogic situations. The organisation part should be about looking for the best way to organize things in a collective way. The CM believes both sides are equally important and therefore also exist to a comparable extent in the profession of the CM.

Although CMs operate in the three roles, their role conceptions differ to a certain degree. CM1 mentions the importance to be actively involved in the discussion on the executive board. CM2 emphasizes that political office holders need to do this and he supports them with context knowledge. CM2 describes that it is up to him, as a director, to decide which direction to take for the organisation. CM3 emphasizes the importance to develop processes in a collective manner. Their role conceptions are related to the way CM's operate. How the CMs operate will be explained in the next paragraph.

6.5 Managerial styles: working in an executive board

How do the city managers perform the three key roles? The stories and observations disclose that the city managers have their own style of working in the executive board. Here's one at work:

It is Tuesday and time for the executive board meeting. The alderman starts to tell a story. The CM listens to the story and squint with his eyes. This gives me the impression that the city manager thinks along. Then the CM gives advice to the alderman. He explains it is important to call and check the information. The alderman replied, "yes I will do that". Another alderman gives an update and the city manager reacts by asking more questions. The city manager wants to know more context information to be able to give a complete report to the organisation. One of the aldermen tells more about a certain issue. The CM explains what his concerns with the topics are and explains what he thinks about the issues. Then a discussion starts at the table. I notice that the CM is actively involved during the executive board meeting. The city manager does not only take notes, he reacts on information from the aldermen.

Another approaches the same role differently:

During another executive board meeting the CM carefully listens to the discussion in the meeting. The city manager has a small black notebook in front of him and uses this to take notes. One of the aldermen asks the CM to report about a phone call. The city manager tells about how the phone call went and what he thinks after the conversation. During the meeting the aldermen and mayor discuss different topics and aspects of issues. The CM listens to these discussions, writes things down and smiles. I notice that the CM is only once actively involved by in a discussion by elaborating on an organisational topic.

The two vignettes illustrate that CMs each have their own way of being a professional advisor for the executive board. According to Schouw and Tops (1998) a style of working can be compared with a style of writing. It is about the visible expression of someone's behaviour in a certain context. According to them a style depends on many factors. It is about the CM's personality, position and authority in the executive board, their work experience, and the specific cultural norms in the municipality. Although many models and theories of managerial styles have been developed (Bititci et al., 2004; Likert, 1967; Rowe and Mason, 1987; Schouw and Tops, 1998), the Cognitive Complexity Model developed by Rowe and Mason (1987) fits with the findings of the styles of working of the city managers. This model concerns four managing styles; The Directive style, The Analytical style, The Conceptual style and The Behavioural style (see paragraph 2.2).

CM1 is described as active and committed. The CM has enough space to say what he thinks and believes during the board meetings. The city manager therefore joins in the conversation. The CM is a

fast thinker and analytically sharp in this way the CM can connect different situations and cases. Board members explain that the CM joins in during different kind of topic like discussion on situations of the city council meeting or quality of policy papers. He is seen as someone with a strong opinion. One of the aldermen said, *“The city manager is actively involved during the board meetings. But I like the way he acts, I think that is fine”* (Int. 7). Moreover, executive board members experience that the city manager is always willing to help when a problem or question is at stake. The city manager is always ‘there’ when they need him. CM1 mentions, *“That is something I actually like. A crisis situation once in a while does not bother me. I get energy from these complicated situations. One of the aldermen once said, maybe you should smile a little less because this is happening right now. But I just like to unravel the puzzle and solve it”* (Int. 1). The way in which CM1 operates in the executive board is comparable to the analytical management style. Individuals with an analytical style have high tolerance for ambiguity. CM has high tolerance for ambiguity and gets energy from complicated or crisis situations. Moreover, he actively joins in the discussions in the executive board. The CM does this in a professional manner with his analytical views and knowledge on cases. But, Rowe and Mason (1987) describe an analytical management style as someone who is focus on task and technical concerns, takes a logical approach and relies upon details models. However, in a political context the CM has to deal with political sensitive topics and relational complicated situations. Therefore he has to unravel puzzles that are not a technical concern, however he does this in an analytical way. This study found that an analytical way of managing does not necessarily need to be connected to technical issues. It can also take place in a political context, where relational issues also take place.

CM2 is described as someone who is supportive to the board. This means that the CM asks critical questions and when necessary shares his opinions on topics. The board members believe that this is a good way to fulfil his role in the board. He always gives his view in a clear and straightforward way of speaking. As the mayor explained, *“He does this in a direct way, however there is still enough room for discussion”* (Int. 10). Moreover, the CM focuses on processes in discussions. The CM warns the board members in difficult dossiers about consequences of actions. The board members are content with this style of working. The CM elaborates that he does not want to act in a meddling way. It is important to him to act when he thinks it is necessarily and valuable. This managing style of the CM2 can be best compared with the directive style (Rowe and Mason, 1987). Someone with a directive style of working focused on tasks and technical issues. Individuals with this style try to implement objectives in a systematic and efficient way. The city manager is someone who focuses on task and process issues. The CM warns aldermen for consequences of actions and acts when he thinks it is valuable. He therefore focuses on implementing objectives of the executive board by an efficient way. Although Rowe and Mason (1987) describe that a directive way of managing is related to someone who dominates the decision-making, the CM does not do this in the executive board setting. As explained by him and political office holders he is only involved in discussions to a certain extent and

does not actively take part in the final decision making process. Therefore a directive way of managing in this case is not related control and domineering decision making, but on process, task and efficiency orientation of the CM.

The style of working of CM3 is described as calm. While the discussion at the table can sometimes be intense, the city manager creates a calm atmosphere. One of the aldermen describes the city manager as “*someone who observes what is happening during the meeting and is conscious about when to act and what to say*” (Int. 19). He is therefore seen by board members as well balanced, thoughtful and described as an honourable colleague. Sometimes the CM takes a moderator role during a discussion. The city manager experiences enough space to intervene during a discussion when necessarily. Furthermore, CM3 believes it is meaningful to regularly talk with each of the board members individually. He explains that he uses these individual contact moments to discuss what he has to say. Moreover, he explains that his advisor role also takes place outside the executive board meeting. He does this by checking the quality of papers, so a grounded discussion can take place at the table. Moreover, he prepares the board meeting with the mayor. It is important for the CM to share his opinion and inform the mayor what topics may lead to discussions. The way of operating of CM3 is related to the behavioural style of Rowe and Mason (1987), The behavioural style has low tolerance for ambiguity. Individuals with this style of working are oriented to people and social concerns. Performance comes from focusing on people and their needs. CM3 creates a calm atmosphere in the executive board, even when discussions get intense. He is seen as well balanced and takes a moderator role in the group. In this way the CM is oriented to the group dynamics and tries to create consensus and shared goals. He therefore focuses on creating low ambiguity. Moreover, he focuses on the needs of the mayor and aldermen by individual meetings. CM3 explains that these individual moments are part of his advisor role and are used to create grounded discussions at the meeting table.

6.6 Managerial styles: working as a CEO

Participants described CM1 as a strong manager. In line with this some participants explained that the city manager may be too potent for the current municipality. They see him as someone who could also easily lead a bigger and more complex organisation, because he focuses on the bigger picture and can easily take stock of complex matters. Within his work as a director, the CM is entrepreneurial and has a hands-on mentality. Furthermore, participants explained that the CM can easily delegate and gives tasks away. This also means that the CM gives a trust feeling to employees. The CM is described as an open and direct person. According to the executive assistant, “*everyone can shortly walk into his office so to say*” (Int. 6). As a director the CM is good at providing feedback to management team members and employees. He pays attention to what is needed for managers and other employees. The CM therefore also tries to commit with employees to reach organisational goals. Although executive board members see CM1 acting with an analytical style, organisational members describe the city

manager as a directive manager (Rowe and Mason, 1987). The city manager is a strong manager, works with a hands-on mentality in an efficient way. However, participants describe the city manager also as relational oriented. Therefore the city manager also operates with a behavioural managing style (Rowe and Mason, 1987). It is interesting to see that the CM does not have one dominating way of operating, but according to participants operates in both styles. The study found that a managerial way of working can be a profile of one or more styles and in contrast to the theory does not have only one dominant style per se.

CM2 is open and accessible to employees. As the executive assistant explains employees can always walk into his office. He is also described as someone who easily takes the lead and can predominate. In that way the city manager is static and stimulates others to take decisions. He focuses on the process of meetings and tries to create solutions. He wants to control these processes and has a great responsibility feeling. As the director of operations explained, *“He feels responsible for his job. He therefore mostly wants to fix issues independently”*. He therefore has a hands-on mentality towards issues.. Moreover, he is described as a direct and straightforward leader. In that way the CM is not seen as a people management person. As the council clerk explained, *“Last time the city manager said to me, I expressed it in my own way. Then I know what he means. He has dealt with the situation in a directive manner”* (Int. 14). Also within the organisation the city manager has a directive managing style (Rowe and Mason, 1987). The CM focuses on tasks, processes and technical issues in the organisation. He is less seen as a people manager. The CM tries to implement objectives in a hands-on and efficient way. He has a directive way of speaking and is straightforward. Furthermore, the CM can dominate and tries to control decision making within the organisation. As the director of the organisation the CM has the final say in which direction to go. This is different from his directive managing style in the executive board, where the CM does not dominate the decision-making. Therefore the study shows that within these two different roles the CM practice the directive managerial style in a different way. It is interesting to see that there is a situational component in his managerial style.

CM3 is also seen as accessible leader. As one of the managers explained, *“You can easily walk to his executive assistant to ask whether she can create some time for you in his agenda. She arranges this and the city manager is totally fine with it and in that way accessible”* (Int. 17). Participants describe the CM as an easy-going leader who gives employees enough freedom. Moreover, he is open and shares information with the organisation. He also asks opinions of employees about situations and wants to connect with them. As the executive assistant summarized, *“in that way you feel equal to him”* (Int. 16). Moreover, according to participants the CM focuses on structures and control. Not in the way that the CM wants to control employees in their job, but he focuses on equivalence in the organisation. The way in which processes and structures are embedded. As the mayor explained, *“He*

focuses on being in control and tries to keep balance. He therefore is good at developing the control cycles of the organisation” (Int. 20). In these processes he gives employees space and freedom. He therefore creates a trusting relationship with employees, where learning and development can take place. The CM connects with employees to reach organisational goals. The CM has also a behavioural style in managing in the organisation (Rowe and Mason, 1987). The city manager orients to relations with employees and social concerns. However, participants also describes that the city managers focuses on structures and control processes in the organisation. The city manager does not do this in a directive way. Although Rowe and Mason did not describe control and structure as part of a behavioural managing style, this study found that a behavioural manager could also focus on these aspects. The CM does not take a directive way of operating as describe by Rowe and Mason (1987), but still focuses on processes and structures as a directive manager pays attention to.

Situational role-taking

Each of the city manager operates in their own way. CM1 has an analytical style of working in the executive board, CM2 a directive style and CM3 a behavioural style. It is interesting to notice that the mayors and aldermen were all content with the way the city managers fulfil their roles. Therefore the data also discloses, as described in paragraph 7.1.1, that a situational component exists. Moreover, CM1 operates with a different managerial style in the executive board than in the organisation. Organisational members see CM1 as a directive and behavioural leader. This shows that the city managers operate in a way that is meaningful for the context they are part of. This means that there is not one right way of working in the executive board in these three cases. This finding fits within contingency and situational theories about public leaders. A style of working in these theories is based on interaction with others and the environment. In this respect, the organisational and environmental elements, tasks and goals that need to be realised are of are of importance in the way of operating for a city manager (Yulk, 2010; Grint, 2010; Grotens, 2015).

On the contrary Grotens (2015) also describes that the CM is to a certain degree an influential factor in social interaction. A CM has role conceptions and can act in a way that he believes is most appropriate. CM1 believes it is important to be actively involved in discussions in the executive board, where CM2 emphasize the importance to only participate when necessarily. Both have a different managing style in the executive board meetings. CM1 an analytical managing style and CM2 a directive managing style. CM2 believes a CM needs to take the final decision and has to decide the direction of the organisation. He operates in a directive managerial style. CM3 believes that via collaboration and consensus administrative and organisational processes can be accomplished. The CM has a behavioural style of managing the organisation. Therefore both CM's role conception and situational components play a significant role in their style of working.

Chapter 7

What have we learned?

7.1 Beliefs, roles and practices of a city manager

This study aimed at providing insight in the everyday life of city managers by studying what activities the CMs pay attention to, what roles they take upon them and perform and how they do this (their style of working). The research question of this study was therefore: *What are the beliefs, roles and practices in the everyday life of a city manager?* To provide an answer to the research question four sub-questions have been used.

With regard to the first sub-question: “How can a day in the everyday life of a city manager be described?”. This study found that there is no such thing as a typical day representing the various activities a CM is involved in. As described by the observation a workday can start in the CM’s office in a bilateral meeting with the executive assistant and can finish outside the municipality in a regional meeting for the city councils. Therefore, when I would describe a day it has many meetings with different purposes, actors and unexpected turns. A day covers meetings with political office holders, organisational members and external partners. It is filled with bilateral and collective meetings, in and outside the municipality.

The second sub-question focuses on “what activities do city managers pay attention to?” Although CMs are involved in various activities they carefully aligning the ‘managing up’ to political office holders, ‘managing down’ to their organisation and the ‘managing out’ to partners and stakeholders. The activities they pay attention to take place in these sub-spheres. A working week of a CM is structured along multiple activities that establish a weekly rhythm. This includes the executive board meeting, the management team meeting and the bilateral meetings with the executive assistant, mayor and secretary of the director/management team. Their week schedule is based on these regular meetings and flexible appointments e.g. bilateral meetings with political office holders, managers, external partners and collective meetings in regional networks. Each CM spends a different amount of time on managing up, down and out. Choices are made based on personal beliefs and values and developments in the external environment. *All* CMs spend a significant amount of time in the public advisory manager profile and the public organisational manager profile. But they did this towards a different extent. CM2 is more external oriented and focuses more on public advisory management tasks. While CM1 and CM3 spend more time in the organisation and focus on internal public organisational manager tasks. Moreover, CMs spend a significant amount of time in external networks, therefore the study found an additional attention profile for CMs: the public collaborative

manager. This means that CMs work within networks and collaborate with neighbouring municipalities.

The third sub-question “what roles do city managers take and perform?” focus on the roles and practices CMs perform. The research found that CMs have to perform three roles: Chief advisor, CEO of the organisation and Connector. In the first role they are a non-partisan advisor in the executive board, they function as an institutional memory, are a sparring partner throughout the week and form a tandem with the mayor. Two practices have especially disclosed new insights. Where CMs are often seen as vulnerable in their position in the executive board, this study found that in their chief advisor role CMs have a certain degree of power by their institutional memory. They know state of affairs and have good organisational knowledge which aldermen and mayor relay on. Moreover, the tandem relation with mayor and CM is seen as strategic and as a way to steer the executive board. Previous studies argue that CMs beholding the political game, but formally are no player in this. However, this finding shows that CMs are involved in the political practices to a certain extent by preparations of meetings, bilateral conversations and their tandem relation as a strategic bond.

In their CEO role CMs chairing the management team, building capacity by management development, try to be present and accessible in the organisation and focus on a strategic perspective. As a connector CMs form the pivot between executive board and organisation, they exercising quality control, are a steward of the political-administrative interface, facilitate political teamwork and coordination in the organisation and are an ambassador and networker in the external environment. Previous studies found CMs as social connectors and as pivotal between executive board and organisation. This study additionally found that CMs also perform a connector role within an executive board “up” and within a management team “down”. Therefore CMs do not principally connect outside the organisation, but still need to create connection within the organisation between different actors. Within these roles CMs mainly operate in the sub-sphere of administrative leaders. However, in practice they also operate in the sub-sphere of political and civil leadership. Therefore the roles and practices of CMs are institutionally and analytically separate spheres of action, however in reality they are often intertwined. This means that the tasks and practices CMs of a certain role are related to tasks and practices in another role.

In addition, the fourth sub-questions discuss the managerial styles of the CMs in the executive board and as the CEO of the organisation. Each of the city manager operates in their own way. CM1 has an analytical style, CM2 a directive style and CM3 a behavioural style. However, the mayors and aldermen were all content with the way the city managers fulfil their roles. Moreover, the study found that the CMs managerial style in the executive board is sometimes different from their managerial style in the organisation. CM1 operates in the organisation in by a directive and behavioural

managerial style and CM2 operates differently within the directive managerial style. The study found that there is a situational component. The city managers operate in a way that is meaningful for the context they are part of and a style of working is based on interaction with others and the environment. Moreover, CM's role conception plays a role in their style of working. For instance, CM2 believes that a CM need to decide what direction to go and has a directive style. CM3 believes organisational processes are developed in a collective way and he has a behavioural style.

All in all, based on this study the conclusion is that the CMs have to perform three central roles Chief Advisor, CEO of the organisation and Connector in relation to different actors. As a connector CMs carefully aligning managing up, down and out. CMs conduct multiple practices through which they perform these three roles. Within these roles each CM has his own managing style, which moreover may vary depending on the arena in which they operate (e.g. the executive board vs the organisation). Their personal beliefs and role conceptions play a role in their style of managing. CMs are involved in various activities during a working day. They pay attention to certain activities in a different extent. CM all spent a significant amount of time in external networks. Therefore the study found that the three city managers speak the same language, they have comparable meetings, work with comparable actors and play comparable roles. But each put different emphases. The city managers pay attention to activities and actors in a different extent and perform their roles in their own way. The city managers therefore speak with different dialects.

7.2 Reflection on the pitfalls of the study

In this paragraph I reflect on the pitfalls of the study by exploring my mistakes and problems during the research. Getting up close harbours some classic pitfalls. I seek to cope with these pitfalls explicitly. I therefore confront the ways in which inadvertent 'bias' crept into the analysis. This chapter is written based on the lessons of Rhodes, 't Hart & Noordegraaf (2007).

It was my ambition to decentre municipalities and to be there to identify the beliefs and everyday roles and practices of city managers. At first, during my observations I was to some degree 'spying' on the city managers. However, the aim of this study was different than that of an investigative journalist. My starting point was cooperation, not spying. I assumed good intentions, not secrecy. I assumed good faith, not deception and duplicity. Therefore I described the city managers as anonymous cases. I allowed the CMs to comment on relevant manuscript of the study. I focused on 'everyday life' and the commonplaces, not sensational issues or activities. Therefore I can be trusted, but trust is not a constant. For example, the CMs frequently asked what I thought about a certain meeting. The CMs explained that it was also an opportunity for reflection of their own practices. However, it may be used to check what my opinions were and to have the opportunity to reflect on those too. Obtaining trust has been a negotiation process during the study.

In line with this, when studying elites, the research participants are more powerful than the researcher. The city managers, mayors, aldermen and managers are powerful men and women. They can refuse interviews and deny access to meetings or documents. I have experienced this during my fieldwork to a certain extent. The CMs had the power to decide which actors in the organisation I could best address for an interview. In that way they had influence on which actors I could talk to. Moreover, two of the CMs explained that they had a private appointment during the week. I could therefore not attend these meetings. However, this pitfall should not be overstated, because I got the opportunity to attend almost all meetings during the observation week and to speak with different actors related to the CMs.

Furthermore, a pragmatic pitfall during my fieldwork concerns hanging out with CMs for a considerable period of time. I shadowed the CMs for one week, had several informal conversations and two interviews. During these fieldwork hours I developed a certain relation with the city managers. I am aware of the fact that I had a better connection with two of the CMs than with the other one. This mainly occurred due to personality differences. I therefore struggled with the question how to stay close, yet neutral. I dealt with this by explicitly writing down when I had certain feelings during the week. In that way I could take this into account while analysing the data. I spoke with several actors related to the CMs. These conversations have helped me with constructing a comprehensive story of the city managers' roles and behaviour.

Moreover, the aim of my 'non-participant' approach has been to remain the outsider. However, for lengthy on-site visits and extensive repeat interviews, you have to have a conversation and relate to the people around you. My presence, as a researcher, may have influenced the behaviour and reasoning of the city managers and other participants. Therefore the data can provide a potentially flawed picture of the city managers' actions and thinking. The CMs may engage in impression management for the researcher rather than going about their business as usual. Although the CMs indicated that they had the feeling that I obtained a complete understanding of their daily work, I am aware of the fact that I may not have observed all aspects of their profession.

Additionally, field notes had their own challenges. I did not always understand the discussion during the meetings. I sometimes missed comments of the speakers because I was busy writing. And I had to divide my time between what is spoken, how it is spoken, behaviour and interaction between actors. In this way I may sometimes have misinterpreted information or may have missed interesting or crucial information during the observation week.

Also, interviews are set to be an unreliable source of data, because interviewees are seen as self-serving to the point of misleading. It is a commonplace that, to get openness in interviews, I had to

establish rapport and trust with the participants. As I explained in chapter 3, I have tried to do this by the ‘I am a novice, teach me’ strategy. However, I experienced that being trustful has been a challenge during the interviews. For example, when I asked the participants to describe the city managers, they mainly described positive features. Only some of the participants have acted more vulnerable by sharing some personal critical notes. Moreover, sometimes participants protected themselves by telling that they could not answer my question. I dealt with this by asking a new question. However, I notice that in this way not all my questions have been answered during the fieldwork.

Further, when doing ethnographic fieldwork the researcher is his own instrument and analytic tool. Because I did the fieldwork myself, theoretical notions that I carried and my previous experiences in doing research have shaped my perception of the field. Although the sensitizing concepts have helped as guidance to enter the research field, they also have had influence in how I studied CM’s craft. My first sensitizing concept concerned three roles for the city manager and my data discloses three similar roles. I am aware of the fact that my previous knowledge therefore may have been of influence in findings these roles. I tried to be as open as possible during the data collection and analysis, but there are similarities between the sensitizing concept and the findings of this study. However, the practices within these roles and the styles of the CM’s were less influenced since ethnographic studies on everyday practices of CMs were not conducted before. Moreover, I found that the third role, social connector, of my sensitizing concept in practice has been broader. CMs are also a connector in the executive board and in the management team. So, theoretical notions have been of influence but to a certain extent.

Finally, the ethnographic case study provides thick descriptions, but can be criticized on a lack of generalisation. I am aware that the findings in this study about the attention, roles and styles of the CMs cannot be generalized. I therefore tried to be specific about this in my conclusion. The study therefore did also not provide ‘best practices’ or ‘lists of competences’ for CMs in general. However, as Agar (1996) argued “*no understanding of a world is valid without representation of those members voices*”. The study therefore did provide rich insight in the craftsmanship of these three managers. The findings of the study are in that way complementary to the recent publications about city managers (Grotens, 2015; Van der Kolk, 2015; Twist et al., 2015) and contribute to open-up the “black-box” of government elites behavior (Rhodes, 2011).

Suggestions for further research

The previous paragraph has already given some clues about possible further research. Based on the diary analysis of the three cases the study found an additional attention profile for public managers “collaborative public manager”. Further research might focus on allocation of time of public managers

to see if this finding will stand.

In addition, the study found that the attention profiles were *all* visible in the allocation time of each CMs. Therefore this study shows that there is no *one best fit* for a CM in an attention profile in these three cases. The question rises whether this finding of these three cases may apply for other public managers. Further research could focus on such a question.

Moreover, the study describes the roles and practices of the three city managers. However, it did not provided “best practices” or “list of competences”. Further research might focus, based on the up-close insights of this study, on best practices in the craft of a city manager. Therefore more cases could be studied to discover best practices and competences CMs perform and have as a chief advisor, CEO and Connector.

Further, I conducted an ethnographic study on one-week observations. This is in comparison with other ethnographic studies a short amount of time. To fully grasp the craftsmanship of CMs and to be able to see and understand tensions, challenges and strategic games in the organization and politics, more time and interaction in the research field would be recommended.

Lastly, it is important to note that this study contributes in opens-up the “black box” of CMs behavior. But, still most of the public administration scientists explore top-level and street-level bureaucrats within the positivist epistemology. Much of it fails oddly to get ‘up close and personal’ data. However, people continue to matter in a technological, globalized and bureaucratized world and therefore ways of getting at the human face of governance are needed. I can therefore conclude to open up the “black box” of government elite beliefs, roles and practices; more research on public elites using ethnographic methods should be conducted.

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