TRAPPED IN THE
HIERARCHY

THE CRAFT OF
DUTCH CITY MANAGERS

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TITLE PAGE

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PREFACE

In the appendix *On Intellectual Craftsmanship* of *The Sociological Imagination*, Charles Wright Mills (1959) writes: *'Now I do not like to do empirical work if I can possibly avoid it. If one has no staff it is a great deal of trouble; if one does employ a staff, then the staff is often even more trouble'*. I have experienced the former and often wished for the latter — ignorance is bliss.

The present Master of Science thesis is the culmination of the research master in Public Administration and Organizational Science at the Utrecht School of Governance. A two year program packed with input on core themes, research design and methodology as well as professional life lessons for the years to come.

I would like to thank prof. dr. Paul 't Hart for his support and companionship over the past two years. I am grateful for the many, many unique experiences — how's dinner at the Catshuis — embodied bits of wisdom, and professional opportunities you have offered me. Your encouragements has made me dare to write this article.

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Erik-Jan van Dorp

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ABSTRACT

The position of top public managers implies management in three directions: up (accessing authorizing environment), down (creating organizational capacity), and out (boundary spanning). We know however, little about what these public managers do. This article draws on research on managerial work and behavior to present a close-up analysis of four Dutch city managers using diary analysis, ethnographic observations (182 hours of shadowing), and 35 interviews with (elite) stakeholders. The analysis interprets the craft of senior public executives in terms of managing up, down, and out. It finds that despite the contemporary emphasis on the importance of network governance and collaborative public management, the prevalence of boundary spanning activities in top managers' activity pattern is easily overestimated. Working up and down in the governmental hierarchy still consumes most of the managers' attention. By comparison, network management occupies a modest place in how they enact their role. Moreover, the networks of choice are almost exclusively inter-governmental; engagement with (networks of) community and corporate actors is virtually non-existent.

TRAPPED IN THE HIERARCHY:
The craft of Dutch city managers

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INTRODUCTION

How do public sector CEO's, in this instance city managers in The Netherlands, give meaning to their craft in their everyday behavior? City managers are the pivots connecting the city's executive politicians and its public service. As public sector CEO's they navigate between political and administrative realities, serving and leading, advising and deciding, boundary spanning and getting things done. Yet, we hardly know what their everyday work entails. How do they operate in a role for which no script exists, in a strategic environment that is unfailingly political, ambiguous and fluid?

Public organizations provide an ambiguous context for public managers (March & Olsen, 1979; Noordegraaf, 2000a). On top of that, public organizations are repeatedly subject to reform (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). The popular scholarly refrain about the rise of the network society (*governance*) that is suggested to replace former hierarchical structures (*government*), inevitably implies new meaning(s) to the craft of public managers, as public managers enact public sector reform when new rules of the game are introduced (Agranoff, 2006; Ansell & Gash, 2008; Cloutier et al., 2016; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). After all, they lead organizations that design and/or implement such reforms. Different roles, contexts and epochs require different skills and expertise (Frederickson & Matkin, 2007). At the same time, the craft of public managers inherently implies responsiveness to democratic political office-holders and a degree of astuteness in reading and operating within the broader political context within which public sector organizations operate (Hartley, Alford, Hughes & Yates, 2015). This presents a puzzle: the burst of literature on *governance* suggests that public manager are most likely involved in (meta-)governance work, but is this the case, and to what extent?

Management within the public sector has received abundant attention in the past decades (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011; Rainey, 2014). Less attention was paid to the work of

managers — what it is they *actually* do. What they do on a daily basis; what activities they prioritize over others is largely unknown. How they act, or for what — explicit or tacit — reasons they do so, remains a mystery. Public managers received even less scholarly attention, compared to either politicians or managers in the private sector, despite the evident influence of these managers and their organizations on public service delivery (Korica et al., 2015). This article studies city managers; public managers who act as CEO of a municipal organization. They have been studied before in various cities (e.g. Allan, 1981; Dargie, 1998; Newell & Ammons, 1987; Sancino & Turrini, 2009), but the managerial work of Dutch city managers has not yet been covered in international journals (but see Berveling et al., 1997; Grotens, 2015; Noordegraaf, 2012).

Several scholars stress the contribution that ethnographic/anthropological studies of managerial work can make in opening up this 'black box' (Korica et al., 2015, p. 19; Rhodes, 2016, p. 645; Watson, 2011, p. 215). These approaches to study managerial work up close, 'as it happens'. In this vein, the present article addresses the following research question: How do city managers, in their everyday behavior, give meaning to their craft?

'Craft' is a well-established lens to interpret the work of public managers that has recently been revived in the literature (Korica et al., 2015; Rhodes, 2016; Tiernan, 2015). By 'craft' I mean a carefully developed set of skills and knowledge — beliefs and practices — that has been acquired through a process of experiential training. A large part of this is tacit, some is secret. Craft is distinct from a 'science', 'profession' or an 'art' by its focus on practical wisdom and activity (Lynn, 1996; Raadschelders, 2004). It does not suggest a one-best-way, like science does, but unlike the arts it has utility (Rhodes, 2016). Originally crafts were sustained in formal communities of practice known as 'guilds' that set standards for practice. In these communities, apprentices were matured in a process of *Bildung* as journeymen and finally into masters of the craft. Today, public managers too apply a set of developed beliefs and practices in their everyday work.

The next section reviews the literature on the work of public managers. The following section describes the design and methods of the study. In the remainder of the article I present the Dutch case: an analysis of the craft of four city managers, after which I end with concluding remarks.

MANAGERS AT WORK: STUDYING ELITES

Capturing the craft: managing up, down, and out

In his account of administrative leadership, 't Hart (2014) distinguishes three key sets of activities for administrative leaders. These activities are aimed in three respective directions. Senior public managers manage *up* when they engage with political office-holders — their *authorizing environment* (cf: Moore, 1995). The relations between top administrators and their democratically elected masters are likely to be complex and interdependent. Many scholars have argued that these relations are more differentiated than the classic Weberian/Wilsonian notion of strict separation suggests (Aberbach et al., 1981; 't Hart & Wille, 2006). Others refer to these relations as a 'bargain' (Hood & Lodge, 2006), 'cooperation' (Furukawa, 1999), or using a five fold typology (Peters, 1978). In turn, Svara (2001) claims that the dichotomy of politics and administration is a myth and stresses the complementarity of politicians and administrators. Management of public organizations includes responsiveness to the government of the day — the 'owners' of government — as well as keeping long term well being attended to (Wilson Jr, 2016, pp. 66-71). Managing up means advising politicians and negotiating democratic legitimacy for the organization's output and maintaining a productive collaboration with political office-holders.

Managing *down* is about building and preserving organizational capacity ('t Hart, 2014, p. 31; Rainey, 2014). As leaders of government organizations, senior public servants are responsible for managing large bureaucracies that advise political office-holders and execute policy and legislation. Organizational leadership includes transforming, reimagining and developing this organization. Public managers attend to both the strategy of the organizations and its long term goals, as well as to ad hoc events that affect the 'going concerns'.

Managing *out* is about interactions with stakeholders, societal partners and competitors outside the leader's organization ('t Hart, 2014, p. 33). Public organizations ascribe increasing importance to governance in networks (Provan & Kenis, 2008). Using networks of valuable partners is an important lever for administrative leaders to create public value beyond the walls of their own organizations (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Government managers have a role as meta-governors of these governance networks (Torfing et al., 2012). Managers are expected to be boundary spanners which connect (Guarnos-Meza & Martin, 2016).

I will use the distinction between managing up, down, and out as a structuring device for exploring the craft of city managers (summarized in Table 1 below). I examine how city managers allocate their time across these three domains and relationships, as well as how they give meaning to these three components of their craft.

Table 1: Summarizing management practices

Direction	Practices
Up	- Advising politicians - Negotiating democratic legitimacy for the organization's output - Maintaining a productive collaboration with political office-holders.
Down	- Building organizational capacity - Transforming the organization - Managing strategy vs. going concerns
Out	- Interact with societal partners outside the administration - Meta-governance

The study of top public managers

A particular strand of the literature has focused on the question of what managers do (Mintzberg, 1971, 1973; Martinko & Gardner, 1985; Noordegraaf, 2000a). Using observational methodology scholars studied public managers up close (Kaufman, 1981; Rhodes, 't Hart, Noordegraaf, 2007; Rhodes, 2011). A landmark study on managerial behavior is Mintzberg's (1973) *The Nature of Managerial Work*. He studied five managers of both public and private organizations up close and observed what they did. Contrary to classic managerial insights e.g. POSDCORB[1] activities, Mintzberg characterized managerial work with 'brevity, variety and fragmentation' (1990). Managers were not depicted as rational planners, but as people who emphasized action over reflection (Rainey, 2014, p. 348). Their working days were filled with impromptu activities and ad hoc meetings. They would interact with others, rather than lock their doors and think great thoughts (Mintzberg, 1973, p. 37).

Notwithstanding the influence of Mintzberg's study on the literature on managerial work, his study was neither the first nor the last (Martinko & Gardner, 1985). Multiple literature reviews indicate that scholars have since followed in Mintzberg's footsteps and replicated (parts of) his study (Bartelings et al., 2016; Tengblad, 2006), mimicking his observations

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[1] Planning, Organizing, Staffing, Directing, Coordinating, Reporting, and Budgeting

and shadowing methodology (see also Czarniawska, 2014; Noordegraaf, 2000b), and conducting diary studies (Dargie, 1998; Fleming, 2008).

Korica et al. (2015, see also Johnson, 2013) present 96 studies of managerial work in public and private managers on low, middle and executive level in European, Anglo-Saxon and Asian contexts, covering classic studies from the 1950s and '60s (e.g. Carlson, 1951) up to recent studies by Tengblad (2012) and Cloutier et al. (2016). They discern four research approaches to the study of managerial work. The first studies of managerial work tried to grasp how management affected organizations. Scholars aimed to develop normative ideal types for management in various settings. The second approach, epitomized by Mintzberg's aforementioned classic, focused on categorization of managers' roles. The third approach gained currency in the 1980's and 1990's when scholars noted that managerial work was not a neutral set of skills and behavior, but a set of political skills and situated moralities that reinforced societal structures and power (im)balances (e.g. Knights & Wilmott, 1986). Finally, in the first decade of the 2000s managerial work was being studied as 'ordinary meaningful activity' (Korica et al., 2015). The analytical focus is on how the everyday lives of public managers 'really' unfold (Rhodes, 2011). Managerial work is conceptualized as a 'practiced craft'. This craft is increasingly analyzed using qualitative research methods.

In contrast to the abundance of literature on what management should be about and what it should entail, relatively few scholars discuss what management actually is — or what managers really do. Managerial work, especially in the public sector, has received relatively little scholarly attention, despite the evident importance of knowing what managers do. Korica et al. (2015, p. 4) covered only three studies that focus on managers in government, three studies on healthcare managers and five on managers in education. Also, of the studies that analyze multiple sectors, few include public sector managers (but see Dargie, 1998), and even less discussed managers at the executive level. The few existing studies present managerial work in separate categories, such as desk work, travel, meetings, phone calls, etc. (see e.g. Tengblad, 2006). Less scholars pay attention to whom public managers interact with; a relational perspective. This article fills this gap by deploying the aforementioned logic of 'up, down, and out' to study how public managers allocate their time and attention over the vertical axis of internal matters relating to political office-holders and the organization, and the horizontal axis of connecting to actors outside to the organization.

In sum, the recent literature on managerial work has turned to a focus on managerial work as 'ordinary meaningful activity'. Authors argue that public managers practice their craft

through everyday behavior and the tacit and explicit knowledge they exert. I contend in concert with others, that despite decades of interests in managerial work, the body of knowledge is remarkably small (Cloutier et al., 2016; Dargie, 1998). The subset literature that has empirically studied managers in the public sector is even more limited — though there are notable exceptions.

DESIGN AND METHODS: BEING THERE

This study employs a nested multi case study design (Stewart, 2012). Each case is a city manager (CM) nested in the context of Dutch local governance. Four CMs have been studied in-depth in order to compare and contrast the findings in each case, borrowing from previous studies of managerial work (Mintzberg, 1973), senior public managers (Noordegraaf, 2000a); local government executives (Dargie, 1998) and Whitehall senior public servants (Rhodes, 2011). Table 2 profiles the four cities/city managers in middle-sized to large cities in the Netherlands who agreed to be observed and have their diaries analyzed. Access to cases 1-3 was negotiated with assistance from the Dutch Association for City Managers; CM 4 was contacted independently by the author.

Table 2: Case Selection

City Manager	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4
City size	150,000+	150,000+	80,000+	600,000+
Age category	50-59	60-69	40-49	60-69
Education	Law, Public Administration	Law, Public Administration	Law	Law
Years as city manager	5-9	10-19	0-4	10-19
In studied city	0-4	10-19	0-4	0-4
Tenure in studied city	0-4	10-19	10-19	0-4
Organization FTE	1,500-2,000	1,000-1,500	500-1,000	10,000-15,000

Data collection: diary analysis, shadowing and interviews

Three methods have been used to collect data: diary analysis, shadowing and (elite) interviews. These serve to include the tactile experience of 'being there' — to capture the 'sensation' of the context in which city managers work. Participant observations are

regarded as a well suited method for answering questions about the practiced craft of public managers (Rhodes, 2016), while interviews are suitable for learning about the beliefs of the public managers. The combination of these methods together allows for triangulation, by analyzing the patterns of practice, speech and written words in parallel (Davies, 2001; Gains, 2015; Lilleker, 2003; Oakeshott, 1996). Data was collected in March-July 2016.

(i) Diary analysis

The CMs' 2015 diaries were content-analyzed using a coding scheme inspired by similar previous studies (e.g. Dargie, 1998; Fleming, 2008). The diary of CM 4 was not made available and was thus omitted from the analysis. All diary records were coded using the (pre-tested) coding scheme in Table 3 below. It uses the logic of 'up' (political super-ordinates); 'down' (subordinates); and 'out' — activities in networks outside the municipal organization ('t Hart, 2014, pp. 26-33). In addition to these three relational categories (whom managers interact with)[2], the latter three codes (social, travel, and other) are content based. Given that the codes are not fully mutually exclusive, reflexive judgment, grounded in observations, was required.

Table 3: Coding Scheme Agenda Analysis

Code	Sub code	Explanation
Up	*Collective*	Meetings with two or more political office-holders, i.e. mayor, aldermen
	Individual	Meetings with an individual political office-holder
Down	*Direct Report*	Meetings with employees that directly report to the city manager, i.e. directors, unit heads
	Executive Assistant	Meetings with executive assistants or entourage
	Other	Meetings with other employees, tours, and desk work
Out	*Local*	Activities in/for local networks
	Regional	Activities in/for regional networks
	National	Activities in/for national networks
Social		Attending social events such as diners or drinks, in a professional capacity

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[2] Whether a given diary entry is perceived as up/down/out by city managers, is not solely determined by relational categories, but is also contingent on e.g. practices and the content of the recorded diary items. The applied method cannot easily capture practices and the content of the diary entries, resulting in a limited interpretation.

Travel	Time reserved for traveling
Other	Miscellaneous activities (e.g. giving a guest lecture at a university)

(ii) Shadowing

Four CMs were shadowed for five days each[3]. The observed time totals 182 hours. I have been in and out the field multiple times, reflecting yo-yo fieldwork (Rhodes, 2011; Wulff, 2002). Encompassing city halls, medieval chambers, meeting rooms, backseats of chauffeured limousines, cross-city bike rides, offices of city agencies, and permeated by ICT, the field was multi-sited (cf: Huby et al. 2011). I have observed executive board meetings, city council meetings, many bilateral conversations, and saw CMs answering emails at their iPads. Elaborate note-taking resulted in a corpus of notes (40,000+ words) in multiple fieldwork notebooks[4] (Emerson et al. 2011).

During the observations I adopted a *fly on the wall* approach (cf. Czarniawska 2014): I shadowed the CM, was present but overwhelmingly silent at all meetings and conversations I attended. Being a fly on the wall implies maintaining a fragile balance between unobtrusively observing the city manager and his various colleagues and associates (so as to minimize any observer effects), and actively managing my presence among them (so as to legitimize my presence and establish rapport in view of future access for interviews). In practice this boiled down to acting the part of a professional stranger — who does not interrupt the ongoing activities (Agar, 1980). When asked, the CMs indicated that they had been not interrupted by my presence.

(iii) Interviews

The observations and diary analysis were complemented by 35 semi-structured interviews with 26 CMs and other stakeholders who operate close to CMs (some were interviewed more than once; see further Appendix A). The interviewees were selected using the same logic of 'up, down and out'. The selection includes — besides (deputy) CMs — mayors, aldermen, directors, unit heads and executive assistants. Most of these interviews would qualify as elite interviews (Lilleker, 2003; Littig, 2009). Interviews usually took place in the offices of the interviewees; two were conducted by phone. All but the two phone interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. All interviewees were

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[3] City manager 4 was shadowed for four days. On the fifth day, the deputy city manager was shadowed in the same organizational context.

[4] When referring to notes in my field work notebooks , I use (FWNB, case X) as a reference.

promised anonymity. The interviews were semi-structured, partially based on a general topic list (attached in Appendix B) but also on case-specific information or triggered by the observed events and conversations.

Data analysis

Field research resulted in four notebooks with field notes, written documents (policy papers, meeting agendas, local newspapers) and photographs. Not all data is reported in the present article. Interpreting actions and implicit 'theories-in-use' is an elaborate process (Mintzberg, 1973). Understanding 'what was done by what was said, and what was said by what was done' is not an easy task for ethnographers, and requires social skills and reflexibility (Van Hulst et al., 2012, p. 440). 'How is such an unruly experience transformed into an authoritative written account?' (cited in Van Maanen, 2011, p. 1). Data was analyzed by thematic coding, complemented by extensive reading and lexical searches (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A first phase of open and axial coding resulted in a list of potential themes for analysis. A second phase of selective coding resulted in the interweaving of empirical results and the existing literature.

Empirical generalization was not the aim of the exercise. The resultant account of the four managers' working lives can best be interpreted as provisional unfolding stories about possible realities in the world of top public managers (cf: Rhodes et al., 2007, p. 225).

FINDINGS

City managers in Dutch local government

Pollitt & Bouckaert (2011) describe The Netherlands as a consensual polity with a history of consociational democracy. Institutionally, the Dutch state can be characterized as a 'decentralized unitary' state (Toonen, 1990). Dutch municipal government evolves around three institutions: the 'city council', the 'Board of Mayor and Aldermen' and the 'mayor'. The directly elected city council is regarded as the highest ranking body, because it decides on the appointment or dissolution of the board of mayor and aldermen, and holds the board to account (Derksen & Schaap, 2007). The board of mayor and aldermen drives the core executive of the municipality. The mayor is appointed by the crown, the aldermen by the city council — neither has to have a local electoral mandate. The mayor

chairs both the board of mayor and aldermen and the city council. Depending on the size of the municipality, two to eight aldermen have a seat in the board.

Although 'city manager' is most common in the international public administration literature, in Dutch local government practice other vocabulary is in use. The Dutch term for 'city manager' (CM) is 'gemeentesecretaris', which literally translates as 'municipal secretary'. In common parlance, they are referred to as: *'secretary general'; 'the secretary'; 'the sec';* or *'madame/mister secretary'.* Most city managers have 'general director' (chief executive officer) as part of their formal job title. The CM is appointed by the board of mayor and aldermen. He acts as the secretary of the board[5]. He attends the board's weekly meetings and along with the mayor signs the decision papers of the board. Unlike the other board members, the CM does not have voting powers. Every municipality is legally obliged to have a CM. The city manager traditionally also acts as the civil servant in chief. He is the managing director of the municipal organization which advises the board of mayor and aldermen and executes the administration's policies.

The city manager's working week

The analyzed diaries reflect respectively a mean of 35.03; 30.63; and 31.48 hours of planned activities per week (further data are provided in Appendix C). Adding up daily ad hoc meetings, an occasional crisis situation and mundane activities such as waiting for people that do not show up on time, walking through the building and finetuning diaries, the result is a busy week. These recorded hours preclude a lot of the work done by city managers; reading papers, writing proposals (if they write any), making phone calls and reading emails and replying to them. A lot of these activities are postponed until the evenings or weekends (cf: Dargie, 1998). *'Friday is the moment when I look out to the next week and decide what I ought to do the upcoming weekend. I spend about 4 to 8 hours a weekend on preparations for the week and reading. A lot of reading happens during the weekend. I have less time for that on weekdays. I also answer emails, when I'm lagging behind.'* (Interview 1). A sample of a CM's evening is given below (FWNB, case 1).

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[5] For anonymity purposes, I use 'he' referring to both male and female managers. Although I could have used 'she' as well, I use 'he' because the majority of both the case selection (3 out of 4) of the present study and of the present population of Dutch city managers (81% of all regular members of the Dutch Association of City Managers) is male (VGS, 2012).

A city manager's Monday evening

18:00 - 19:00	Groceries at super market, cooking and having dinner
19:00 - 20:00	Emails and phone calls
20:00 - 21:00	Working on a proposal about organizational leadership
21:00 - 22:00	Private phone call with family member
22:00 - 23:00	Writing letter to Works Council
23:00 - 23:30	Reading papers for executive board meeting

Rhodes (2011) refers to the protocols and rituals that he has observed among Westminster and Whitehall elites. One such ritual is the red box with papers that ministers carry home. This ritual creates a rhythm in the work patterns of civil servants wanting to get papers into the minister's box. The diaries show that the week of a CM too is structured along multiple cyclical events and practices that establish a weekly rhythm. CMs tended to get in at 08:45 and remained at the office until 18:00 (FWNB). Mondays were dominated by bilateral meetings, starting with the mayor and direct reports. The weekly meeting of the board of mayor and aldermen and possible follow-ups or joint site visits are regular fixtures on Tuesdays or a collective visit. This board meeting sets the pace of the municipal organization. It is perceived by civil servants as the pivotal locus of political decision making affecting the organization; this is where policy proposals submitted by the public service survive or get killed. Wednesdays started with the city's management team meeting of all top public servants), another key reference point in the week. The remainder of the Wednesday is often spent on visits to city agencies or in regional networks. Thursdays are mostly devoted to managerial work inside the organization, often with time reserved for the Works Council, bilateral meetings with staff and internal socials. Often followed by a meeting of the city council or a council committee. Fridays are days for contemplation, and various activities. Friday is often cut short till no later than 14:30, after which the weekend comes with ample readings that feed into yet another week.

Allocating attention

Figure 1 below pictures how three CMs allocated their time during the year immediately preceding the observation. How did they distribute their attention between managing up, down and out?

Managing up

All three managers clearly prioritized their role as adviser in chief by their attendance in settings with political office-holders (POHs). The majority of this time was passed in collective settings, with multiple POHs present such as the weekly executive board meeting, or a (bi)weekly meeting with the mayor and the council clerk. Despite the fact that city managers spent relatively many hours in the company of POHs, these hours were largely represented by meetings that take long: executive board meetings and city council meetings. The remainder of the week was spent apart from POHs.
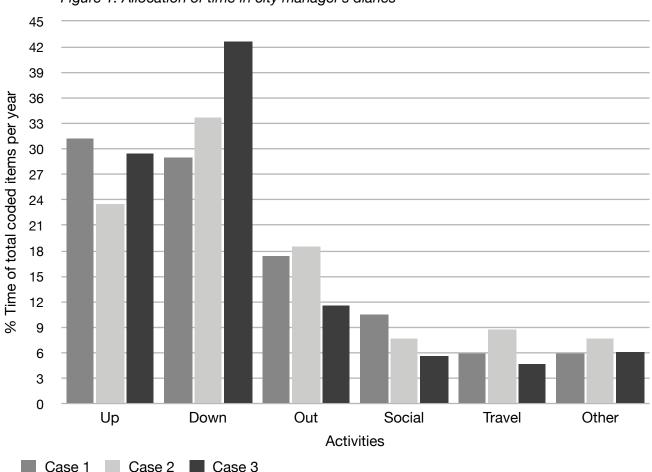
Figure 1: Allocation of time in city manager's diaries

Managing down

Figure 1 shows that the observed CMs spent most time on the management of their organizations. The majority of this time was spent attending to direct reports, other managers and staff. Explicit dealings with executive assistants reflect but a mere fraction of the time, though they may be heavily underrepresented in the official diary. CM 3 spent almost half of his time (42.7%) on management, especially dealing with direct reports. The diary of CM 2 too reveals a priority of management. CM 1 is an exception, as he

spent most time in dealings with political office holders (31.2%), although closely followed by management (29.0%). All CMs spent most time with direct reports, reflected by less time spent with other people in the organization. The absence of desk work (e.g. writing, reading) in the diary is confirmed by the observations — it has little place in the diary nor in everyday life. CMs 1 and 4 did not even have a desk. The absence of desk work is consistent with findings from managers in other sectors (Tengblad, 2006).

Managing out

'Out' — activities in networks — tended to come third in the attention hierarchy. Van der Steen et al. (2012) note that regional cooperation is highly contingent on the CM and his personal priorities. CMs 1 and 2 spent 17.3% and 18.6% of their time in networking activities. CM 1 divided his time across local, regional and national networks, while CM 2 focussed on regional and national networks. CM 3 spent comparatively little time external management (11.5%). Those 11,5% was predominantly spent on large national events that virtually all Dutch CMs or local government managers attend, as well as on a monthly regional network meeting with colleagues (FWNB, case 3). Networking activities thus were less prominent in his diary and were fairly isolated rather than habitual.

The final categories, 'social' (average 8.0%); 'travel' (average 6.4%); and 'other' (average 6.5%) consumed only a relatively modest part of the diary. Within these categories, there are relatively large differences. E.g. CM 1 was more prominently engaged in 'social' activities than others (10.5%) while CMs 2 and 3 devoted 7.7% and 5.7% of their appointments to social events These activities usually include receptions, dinners and lunches. CM 2 spends more time (8.7% versus 6.0% and 4.6% respectively) on the road than others do, which is largely explained by his prioritization of networking activities. Again, the diary of CM 3, who spends less time on activities in/for networks, reflects 4.6% time spent on traveling. Traveling is of course no idle time. The city managers in the three largest cities (1,2 & 4) have access to chauffeured cars which permits working while traveling. It is used for reading, phone calls and answering emails (FWNB, case 2,4).

Attention: An organizational agenda

All three city managers' diaries reflect a dual focus on both managing the political office-holders and management of the organization. The activities coded as 'up' and 'down' and

the combination of the two are recognized as the most important. A CM remarks: *'The core of my craft as city manager is to be a bridge between the board of mayor and aldermen and the organization'* (Interview 7). Using Noordegraaf's (2000, pp. 243-246) typology, all four city managers best fit the public *organization* manager profile. Public *organization* managers are focused on the organizations they lead; involvement in political arenas and processes is markedly less time-consuming. Though 'managing up' is expected of such managers, and political sensitivity/astuteness a key part of the skill set, their strategic focus is first and foremost 'downwards'.

The core of their craft materializes *within* the organizations they manage. Managing 'down' is therefore what the three city managers do much of their working hours. This is also what they spend most of their time on (up to 42.7%). They have an organizational 'mental agenda' and prioritize organizational change. CMs 1 and 3 were both relatively new in their positions, and each had reorganization ambitions, aimed at 'getting the organization into shape', either mentally or both mentally and structurally. Implementing their view of a 'good municipal organization' formed a *raison d'être* for the managers. For the longer-serving CM 2 this was less of a priority. His focus in managing down was on 'continual strengthening' and preserving the existing qualities of the organization; his prime mental focus was in managing 'out' aimed at shoring up and shaping regional cooperation processes. Yet his actual pattern of attention and attendance (18.6% in networks) did not differ all that drastically from CMs 1 and 3 (respectively 17.3% and 11.5%).

INTERPRETING THE CITY MANAGER'S CRAFT

The craft of public managers entails many practices, including serving POHs, leading an organization, active partaking in networks, as well as providing comfort and relief to POHs and tackling budding problems before they become political (cf: Dargie, 1998; Demir & Reddick, 2012; Mintzberg, 1973; Rhodes, 2016). The present study focuses on the three key dimensions of managing up, managing down, and managing out. I discuss the observed practices and the influences they employ to get things done (summarized in Table 4 below).

Managing up: counseling political office-holders

The city manager is adviser in chief to the mayor and aldermen. This position however is not a given and must be earned: *'It is not the case that when someone is a city manager and gives his opinion, that all board members will take a bow and say: ''Thank you, mister Secretary. That's the way forward''. It is a position that needs to be earned and, to some extent, needs to be fought for'* (Mayor, Interview 31). CMs need to acquire 'standing' among POHs to fully fulfill this role, in a field also populated by executive directors and/or unit heads who are content experts on a certain dossier. The CMs I observed all gave both content-based and procedural advice. Much of the latter related to tactical matters of political feasibility and reputational concerns. Some would ask questions e.g. *'is alderman [name] on board with this?'* or give them guidance: *'communicate solely about what you are doing, not about what you intend to do'*. In doing so they draw on their experience and past performance of the city manager (FWNB, Case 2), rooted in what Weber (Lassman & Speirs, 1994, p. 178) coined *Dienstwissen* – a deep understanding of procedural and legal know-how – as well as in the political astuteness built up through years of direct exposure to the politics of executive government (Alford et al., 2014). Advice is delivered in real-time during both formal meetings, little asides and impromptu interactions, and is more often than not verbal (hence not FOI-able) or via private digital media such as WhatsApp.

Giving counsel to POHs includes the element of *speaking truth to power*. For instance, after a series of budget cuts imposed by the board, CM 3 believed that new efficiency cuts were no longer acceptable — stating *'I don't intend to return with new budget cuts'* to his colleagues before an executive board meeting (FWNB). This implies that CMs are involved in politics — the art of the possible — but not necessarily *party* politics. The city managers had their private political views, but showed little interest in local party statements or positions. They were more involved in 'small-p' politics — defending the interests of their organizations vis-a-vis political office-holders. Their involvement in politics, effectively makes them 'political administrators' (Rhodes, 2016, p. 639).

All except CM 4 resided in offices right next to the mayor and aldermen — providing them with an 'open door' to the powers that be at all times (FWNB, Case 1, 2 and 3). They work with and for the political executive; the legislature is kept at arms length – its needs are looked after by the City Clerk. CMs do attend council meetings, even though they play no part in them. Their reasons for doing so are opportunistic: *'knowing first hand what is*

going on in the council'; *'earning bonus credits for being present'*; and *'to quickly prompt aldermen on issues'* (Interview 1; FWNB, case 3).

Managing down: organizational stewardship

CMs actively elaborate the organizations in which they and their coworkers work. It is part of their job to monitor and adjust the organization's current performance as well as (re)imagine its future in light of evolving public and political demands as well as financial, technological and other contextual changes. All four city managers were involved in some form of a program aiming to improve the organization and reshape its behavior. CM 1, for example, employed a mantra of four core principles guiding the changes that he imagines: *'one organization'*; *'the challenges are central'*; *'efficient operations'*; and *'entrepreneurial employees'* (Interview 1). He used these four principles regularly as beacons to guide his way in managing the organization, constantly articulating the principles during his meetings. He believed that disciplined repetition of the same story was essential, as a new managerial narrative trickles down only slowly. And he often told stories about his interventions:

> *This story is about a certain policy unit. An additional two million Euros had already been spent on improving their processes. This unit was not located in the municipal office, but off site. I hadn't been there before, because every time we spoke, we met in my office. After a while I thought to visit them, because I had trouble explaining their budget exceeding without any tangible results — I was worried. So I went there. When I entered the premises, there was an office space with a terrarium and carpets on the floor. It looked like a living room. I immediately understood the problem; this was not a professional outfit; it had become a proxy family unit. Within the month we had canceled the lease, and they were in my sight at the municipal offices* (Interview 5).

The most important lever to create organizational capacity for city managers is the board of directors, the 'management team' of the city administration (cf: Steyvers, Reynaert & Block, 2010). CM 2 spoke for all four when he observed that: *'The quality of the organization starts with the quality of the board of directors'* (Interview, 13). CMs were keen on having the right people in this board: CM 1 let go of two directors on his board and hired a new director in his first months in office.

In board meetings, CMs lead discussions, seek consensus, and, if need be, make unilateral decisions on organizational matters. To be effective in this role requires effective chairmanship: bringing people with diverse outlooks and interests on board. One director commented on how his fellow director developed after he was appointed city manager.

> *Director:* *I have always perceived him as very critical, almost as an outsider*
>
> *Van Dorp:* *As the devil's advocate, you mean?*
>
> *Director:* *Yes. That's one of the reasons why he grew so fast. Also the reason why I stimulated him to go in senior management.* [….] *By now, he has let go of that role. He currently is a connector. I think it's impressive when someone develops like that* (Interview 28).

In all cities, the management team monitored the state of the organization based on a dashboard of parameters and structured information streams. They analyze organizational performance by both 'hard' and 'soft' indicators. 'Hard' indicators parameters include: absenteeism (absolute and compared to national average); annual employees' appreciation survey; exhaustion of budgets; external hiring; and FTE formation (FWNB). 'Soft' indicators are gossip and hearsay about how well pivotal actors or units perform. This information reaches the CM through (informal) talk with civil servants, POHs, and members of his entourage. When certain units under-perform, or certain dossiers are regarded as politically explosive, a CM may declare them '*Chefsache*' and place them under his direct supervision. At the same time, CMs acknowledge that control of their large organizations is an illusion. They 'steer' and 'adjust' the meta strategy of the organization, but the execution of these directions is in the hands of others.

Managing out: boundary spanning

Third, as administrator in chief of their respective organizations, boundary spanning is part of their craft. The pivotal position of CMs — linking POHs with the organization — inherently implies connecting different actors and rationalities. Boundary spanners are loosely defined as 'individuals who work across different organizational cultures and exercise influence through formal and informal channels in order to strengthen the connections between actors' (Guarneros-Meza & Martin, 2016, p. 240).

CMs connect with colleagues in neighboring cities and governance levels in regional cooperation and lobby. They come in various guises, but none of them work in splendid

isolation — beautifully expressed by the prominence of the meeting table in their offices (FWNB). Of course they are by and large preoccupied with the POH-organization nexus. Given their pivotal position in the organization and role as secretary of the board of mayor and aldermen this is hardly surprising. Still, spanning boundaries in networks is part of their craft.

All observed CMs engage in regional networks and intra-city alliances. These networks include in particular fellow city managers and other administrators, and sometimes POHs. These networks range from collaborative governance networks in which municipalities co-produce public services (FWNB, Case 2) to informal deliberation fora (FWNB, Case 1, 4). This requires CMs to be diplomats on behalf of their administration (cf: Rhodes, 2016). Bartelings et al. (2016) use the language of 'orchestrational' work when referring to public managers that manage collaborative networks/chains. In a similar vein, CM 4 stressed the importance of 'being able to make *arrangements'* in a public address to fellow city managers (FWNB). Three CMs indicated that they would engage in lobby among administrators and/or politicians in ministerial departments in The Hague (FWNB, Cases 1,2,4). One CM explained that he would go to lunch with a director-general, to 'put my city on the map' (FWNB, case 1). Another CM joined committees of the Dutch Association of Municipalities (VNG) to engage with other municipal administrators.

The boundary spanning work of the CM should not be exaggerated. They all agree that collaborative governance is important, but the demands of managing up and managing down can and often do take over. The 'rules of the game' in local government seem to favor internal affairs over external activities. CM 1 started his position by actively investing in regional involvement, but paused some of these efforts when his vertical managerial tasks seemed more pressing. CM 3 too started in his current position and prioritized vertical managerial work over horizontal networking activities. In contrast, CM 2, who had been in office since 2004, made ample time for regional and national networks. This may hint at a 'life-time-cycle'-effect suggesting that upon taking office, city managers first attend internal matters and try to get their organizations in shape, before they get involved in external networks.

Table 4: Craft of city managers

Direction	Core practice	Influences	Allies	Competences
Up	Counseling	- Experience - Standing	- Directors - Executive board advisers - Entourage	- Political antennae ('t Hart & Wille, 2006) - Political astuteness (Hartley et al., 2014) - Empathy (FWNB) - Dienstwissen (Lassman & Speirs, 1994)
Down	Practicing stewardship	- Position	- Directors - Entourage	- Analytical skills - Public performance (FWNB) - Discipline
Out	Boundary spanning	- Membership - Social capital	- Executive assistant - Colleague city managers	- Diplomacy (Rhodes, 2016) - Interorganizational experience, transdisciplinary knowledge, cognitive capability (Williams, 2002)

I have described the work and behavior of public managers as a shared craft; something all four CMs relate to. As following from the analysis above, public managers are individuals which each show unique expressions of beliefs and behavior in their respective social and institutional contexts. Though they are not dissimilar, they are not one and the same. Ultimately, this typology is not about a hierarchy of tasks, roles and competencies. The point is that senior public manager such as CMs deploy a repertoire of skills, tricks of the trade and rules of thumb. Mastering the craft means that public managers can judge to apply the right mix of skills and interpretations at a given moment in a local context. My fieldwork however suggests that the central tension Dutch CMs experience in doing so is that between a 'greedy' vertical axis of managing up and down, and a strategically important but always somewhat less pressing horizontal axis of managing out.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

This article set out to address a less than fully developed aspect of public management research: examining close up how senior public managers – in this instance Dutch local government CEO's - give meaning to their craft in their everyday behavior. Using diary analysis and ethnographic methodology, four city managers in Dutch middle-large and large cities were analyzed. The findings show that these CMs consistently allocate most of their time on management of their organizations (down) and advising political office-

holders (up). Taking part in networks (out) is believed to be important, but the diary analysis shows that less time is spent on networking activities than they spent on the former levers. The lion's share of their work takes place within the hierarchy, despite the deafening chorus of the *Network Society* (Agranoff, 2006; Ansell & Gash, 2008; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). I do not argue that boundary spanning does not happen, but rather that the observed CMs themselves engaged much less in boundary spanning work than could be expected. The rhetoric of *governance* seems at odds with the everyday reality of *government* in the working life of CMs. To date, their craft continues to be mainly organized along the vertical up-down axis.

At the same time, we know from a great deal of research that network governance and collaborative problem-solving has become common place in many government jurisdictions and policy sectors. This raises the question who gives strategic direction to this work and undertakes the meta-governance work associated with it — if not the CM (Torfing et al., 2012). CMs may for example deliberately recruit and empower designated boundary spanners or delegate responsibility for network management down the hierarchy, but in the current study there was not much evidence to suggest that this was indeed the case. In the four cases studied here, city managers in effect were largely 'missing in action' when it came to managing out. They did realize its strategic importance and paid lip service to it, but in their day-to-day routines they are largely trapped in the demands of their hierarchy-related roles as chief adviser and CEO of the municipal organization.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWEE SELECTION

#	Case	Vocation	Date	Recorded (Audio)
1	1	City Manager	08-03-2016	Yes
2	1	City Manager	14-03-2016	Yes
3	1	Executive Assistant to city manager	15-03-2016	Yes
4	1	City Manager	16-03-2016	Yes
5	1	City Manager	17-03-2016	Yes
6	1	City Manager	18-03-2016	Yes
7	2	City Manager	31-03-2016	Yes
8	1	Director	11-04-2016	Yes
9	1	City Council Clerk	11-04-2016	No
10	1	Mayor	11-04-2016	Yes
11	3	City Manager	15-04-2016	Yes
12	2	City Manager	18-04-2016	Yes
13	2	City Manager	22-04-2016	Yes
14	2	City Council Clerk	26-04-2016	Yes
15	2	City Manager	26-04-2016	Yes
16	2	Director	28-04-2016	Yes
17	2	Director Safety Region	28-04-2016	Yes
18	2	Unit Head	28-04-2016	Yes
19	2	Alderman	02-05-2016	Yes
20	2	Mayor	09-05-2016	Yes
21	2	Alderman	09-05-2016	Yes
22	2	Mayor	09-05-2016	No
23	3	City Manager	10-05-2016	No
24	3	Alderman	03-06-2016	Yes
25	1	Alderman	30-05-2016	Yes
26	1	City Manager	01-06-2016	Yes
27	3	City Manager	01-06-2016	Yes
28	3	Director	02-06-2016	Yes
29	3	City Council Clerk	03-06-2016	Yes
30	3	Unit Head	03-06-2016	Yes

31	3	Mayor	03-06-2016	Yes
32	3	Executive Assistant to city manager	03-06-2016	Yes
33	4	City Manager	28-06-2016	No
34	4	Director	30-06-2016	No
35	4	City Manager	01-07-2016	No

35 interviews were conducted with 26 individual interviewees.
Average duration recording: 42 minutes.
Total duration recordings: 24,5 hours.
All recorded interviews have been transcribed verbatim. All non-recorded interviews were archived by elaborate note taking.

APPENDIX B1: TOPIC LIST CITY MANAGERS

Development Craft
- Upon entering the organization, what did you find?
- What was your baggage / philosophy upon taking office?
  - How did this philosophy develop?
- How did you master your craft?
- How are you effective in this environment?
- What are cyclical developments in this organization?
- How important is content knowledge of dossiers?
- What are dilemmas for a city managers?
- What are a city manager's cardinal sins?
- If a colleague from neighboring city would sit in you chair; what would be different?

Managing up
- Would you say you're a leader or a servant, or both?
  - How does that show?
  - How does that work?
  - What are tensions between these roles?
  - Primacy of politics
- How do political 'events' influence you?
  - To what extent is your authority contingent on the board's mandate in the council?
  - Elections?
- Whom does the City Manager serve?
  - Council
  - Board
  - Mayor
  - 'Citizens'?
- What sets this board apart from other/previous boards?
  - Quality of the board
- Political administrative interplay?
  - Adminsitrative loyalty
  - Political astuteness
- Relation CM with individual board members and Board as a whole

Managing Down

- What is the key to leading this organization?
  - Responsibility
- Leadership: Leitmotif?
- Allies?
- Influence?

Managing Out
- Local
- Regional
- National
  - Interaction with 'The Hague'
- International
- What is the use of networking?

Roles
- What roles do you have?
- How do these roles relate to each other?
- How did these roles develop?

Personal
- What is your signature style?

Observer effect
- How are things going?
- How do others react to my presence?
- Do you recognize differences with other weeks?

General probes
- When did this happen for the last time?
- Could you give an example please?
- Could you tell me how this works? Can you walk me through the steps? [tour question]

APPENDIX B2: TOPIC LIST INTERVIEWEES

All interviews were conducted using a variation on the topic list below. Contingent on the position, experiences and local events, interview questions were tailor-made targeted to the interviewee.

Naissance Craft
- Upon entering, what did you find?
- Entrance City Manager
    - First impression?
    - Why was he recruited?
    - How did this go?
    - How did he/she develop?

Relationships with City Manager
- What do you expect of a city manager?
    - How important is a CM?
- What sets a city manager apart from other directors?
- How do you work together with the city manager?
    - What themes/dossiers
    - Difficulties? Ambiguity?
- How do you see the role of the city manager in the board?
- How would you describe the city manager's advice?

City manager in everyday life
- What do you see of his/her work?
- How often do you meet?
    - For what dossiers or questions would you go to the CM?
- City Manager in a metaphor?

Closing
- Anything else?
- Questions?
- Thanks

APPENDIX C: DATA DIARY ANALYSIS

Category	Case 1 [b]		Case 2 [c]		Case 3 [d]	
	Weekly hours	*% of total*	*Weekly hours*	*% of total*	*Weekly hours*	*% of total*
Up	10.50	31.2	7.22	23.6	9.30	29.4
Political office-holders collective	8.59	25.6	6.10	20.0	7.99	25.4
Political office-holders individual	1.90	5.6	1.12	3.7	1.26	4.0
Down	9.74	29.0	10.33	33.7	13.44	42.7
Management (Direct report)	6.45	19.2	7.51	24.5	8.84	28.1
Management (executive assistance)	0.66	2.0	0.29	1.0	0.83	2.6
Management (other)	2.64	7.8	2.52	8.2	3.77	12.0
Out	5.82	17.3	5.69	18.6	3.63	11.5
Network (local)	1.46	4.3	0.57	1.9	0.44	1.4
Network (regional)	2.26	6.7	3.05	10.0	1.28	4.1
Network (national)	2.10	6.3	2.06	6.7	1.91	6.1
Social	3.52	10.5	2.36	7.7	1.80	5.7
Travel	2.01	6.0	2.67	8.7	1.46	4.6
Other	1.99	5.9	2.37	7.7	1.90	6.0
Total	**35.03**	**99.9%**	**30.63**	**100%**	**31.48**	**99.9%**

[a] Not all percentages add to 100% due to rounding off
[b] Based on 23 weeks (26 minus 3 weeks of holidays)
[c] Based on 43 weeks (52 minus 9 weeks of holidays)
[d] Based on 44 weeks (52 minus 8 weeks of holidays)