Core Values in Public Administration: Tools for Openness and Democracy?

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Abstract

This study presents core values at public authorities in Sweden and discusses them in relation to the legal foundation for the public administration. A corpus-based approach is applied in order to overview the texts where the core values are presented, and to promote an understanding of how ambiguous core value words might be understood, paying particular attention to the high frequent core value openness. Results show that public authorities tend to emphasize the principle of efficiency and service in their assignment, and often choose core values related to that principle, such as helpful, reliable or goal oriented. The principle free formation of speech, on the other hand, a privilege confirmed in the Swedish constitution, is not present among the chosen core value words. The word openness primarily refers to a personal quality or a workplace atmosphere and is both promoted and restricted in the texts. Only in a few instances do openness refer to flow of information, and in those instances, it is restricted. The constitutional right for a public servant to voice his or her opinion freely is thus not emphasized in this type of policy texts.

Key words: *core values, public administration, corpus assisted discourse analysis, platforms of values, free formation of speech*

1. Introduction

Open, or *openness*, has established itself as a kind of flagship core value within the public administration in Sweden in recent years. However, what *openness* means is rarely qualified in the texts where the core values are presented, and which I here refer to as 'platforms of values'. These texts are designed partly to contribute to ongoing discussions of values at the workplace, which makes the fact that a core value remains enigmatic, or open for interpretation, a resource rather than a problem. This paper discusses the core values of public authorities, particularly the potential meanings of ambiguous core value words, and the relation between core values and the legal foundation for public administration. The analysis presented is part of a larger project, which studies the development and functions of platforms of values in public administration in Sweden.[1]

A novelty in the textual landscape of public administration in the early 2000s, platforms of values stand out as texts generally not displaying any explicit relation to legal documents or connection to administrative processes.

Instead, their central feature is a list of freestanding words, referred to as *core values*, or *value words* (Björkvall 2018). The texts are often carefully designed with visual elements like background colours or photographs, giving them a more sophisticated – and perhaps more commercial – appearance than public sector texts in general. Their standing out from other public sector texts, not only by content but also by design, make the genre a novelty worthy of attention. The extract in Figure 1 shows a presentation of core values from 2015.
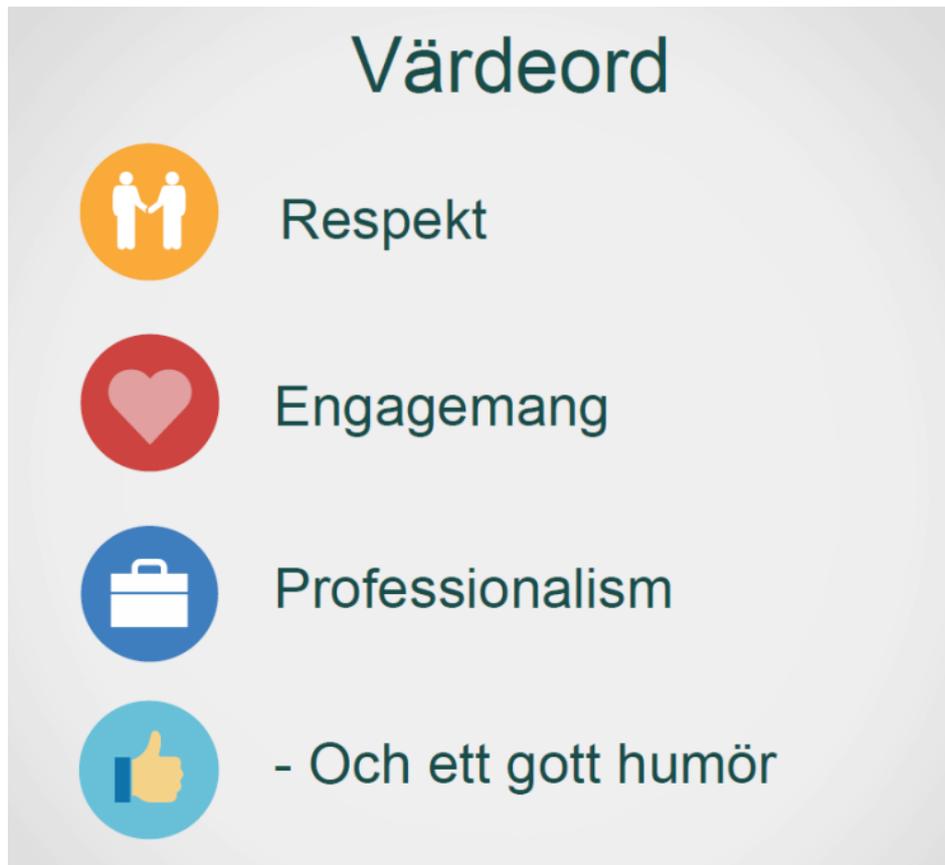

Figure 1. *Värdeord* [Core values]. The text reads (from top to bottom): respect, commitment, professionalism, and a good mood. Formas (a government research council for sustainable development)

In 2016, when the data collection for the topical research was conducted, a majority of Swedish public authorities had a 'platform of values', even though it was not legally required. The production of platform of values, therefore, was a choice made by the individual authorities.[2] No singular explanation as to why there was a need for public authorities to produce PV texts has so far been put forth in research. Instead, three partly interrelated explanations have been suggested. External communication and even competition between authorities is one, particularly valid in relation to universities (formally public authorities in Sweden) and higher education (Wæraas 2010; Lerøy Sataøen 2015; Wæraas and Lerøy Sataøen 2018). In organizational research (Clegg 2011; Reed 2011), the explanation is tied to the re-organization of public sector that took place when traditional top-down organisations changed into a more horizontally dispersed bureaucracy and caused a need for different managerial strategies, such as policy texts (Mulderrig 2011). The third line of explanation

sees the production of policy texts primarily as a result of heightened ethical awareness (Maesschalk 2004; Brereton and Temple 1999; Salminen and Mänttysalo 2013; Lawton and Doig 2006).

In Swedish debates, there has been some critique of the practice of producing and using platforms of values in the public sector (Alvesson 2006, 2015; Hall 2012). Such texts can be seen as demanding attention better left for core assignments of the administration, or as empty expressions for competition and self-promotion. This paper also brings a critical perspective to the practice, focusing on the relationship between the 'platforms of values' produced by individual public authorities, and the foundation for public administration, as established in the Swedish Constitution. In Sweden, a project on public ethos was established by the government in the wake of an administrative committee in 2008 (SOU 2008: 118) which concluded that the existing, but implicit, public ethos needed to be documented and disseminated in an attempt to strengthen the citizens' trust in public administration and to increase efficiency. In 2013, the government established The Common Basic values for the Public Sector, which includes six principles based on legal foundations (*Den gemensamma värdegrunden för de statsanställda – grundläggande rättsliga principer* [Common basic values for central government employees] 2013):

- democracy
- legality
- objectivity
- free formation of opinions
- respect for equality, freedom and dignity
- efficiency and service

The Swedish Government's work continued beyond the establishing of these Common Basic Values, and as of 2017, every public authority in Sweden is required to have a 'platform of values', to revise it continually and report to the government how that work is carried out (*Att säkerställa en god statsförvaltning* 2016). As already mentioned, many authorities were well ahead of this decision, with a 'platform of values' already in use.

This means, literally, that two separate levels of 'platform of values' have evolved within the administration, one based on legislation and one based on choices by the public authorities. The difference between the two sets of values is one aspect of the value practices discussed in this article. To keep them apart, they are henceforth referred to as CBV (The Common Basic Values for central government employees) and PV (platforms of values of individual authorities), respectively. The interrelations between them is a starting point for this study, which sets out to answer the following questions: (1) what core values are selected and promoted by public authorities in Sweden, (2) what democratic principles of the public administration are highlighted and/or silenced in the PV texts and (3) how can the most popular core values be understood? For the purpose of the third question, corpus methods are applied to a sample of PV texts, an approach that opens for a critical

discussion on how ambiguous core value words can be interpreted in the value practices of public sector.

2. *Critical Genre Analysis*

The theoretical and methodological framework for this study is Critical Genre Analysis (CGA), where genre is the medium through which the professional practices of public office and skilled working life can be demystified (Bhatia 2017: 9). Miller's (1984: 164) understanding of genre as 'an index to cultural patterns' and her claim that a sound definition of genre must be based 'on the action it is used to accomplish' (ibid.: 151) is directive in this approach. The analytical focus on genre, in Bhatia's (2017: 6) take, directs the attention towards the interpretation and use of texts in particular contexts, including the study of *professional practices*, which are actions viewed as successful achievements of objectives within a specific professional community. These actions may partly or completely be achieved by discursive processes. Professional practices are formed by, and forms, *professional culture*, where certain forms of 'professional and disciplinary identities are constructed' (Bhatia 2017: 8) and deemed appropriate.

Focussing on genre thus enables a critical understanding of practices within the workplace, but the widening of perspective from text to practice also has methodical implications. Even though genres take discursive form, as text or talk, this needs to be supplemented by ethnographic studies, questionnaires, focus group discussions or background material, which may provide a deeper understanding. Bhatia (2015: 14) advocates 'rigorous analysis of texts in contexts' and suggests a manifold of methods, among them corpus based analysis (Bhatia 2017: 55), as part of an analysis that ensures not only an understanding of the professional practice, but also an in-depth knowledge of the texts involved. This paper, as part of a bigger research project, operates on the text level of the PV genre, but also draws on two other studies directed at the level of professional practice: a focus group discussion among senior HR-managers and a questionnaire performed at three public authorities in Sweden (Nyström Höög and Björkvall 2018). Together, these studies may contribute to an understanding of PV as professional practice within the public administration.

Genre as a critical concept has been applied within the field of CDA (cf. Machin and van Leeuwen 2007; Thurlow and Jaworski 2010), where a text-oriented approach has dominated (Björkvall 2018: 60). According to Thurlow and Jaworski (2010: 22), a genre positions anyone who uses it and participates in it, and in that respect, genres do ideological work. A workplace genre, like the platforms of values, might facilitate and restrict agency when people, in this case civil servants, are acting and being acted upon through the use of texts (Björkvall 2018: 59).

In the CGA design underlying the ongoing research project, *affordance* is an important analytical concept (Björkvall 2018: 65). Originally introduced by Gibson (1977), referring to possibilities and restraints perceived in the environment, affordance has been developed and applied within the fields of CDA (Ledin and Machin 2015; Machin 2016) and social semiotics (Kress

2010). Affordance allows the critical question of what type of meaning-making is invited and what is restricted by genres and element of genres. Previous studies on PV texts show that lists of core values afford continuous discussion on meaning (Björkvall 2018; Nyström Höög and Björkvall 2018). Interpretation of word meaning is often depending on immediate context, but freestanding words have no such context, and are not embedded in speech acts, which is why they are an important resource in texts designed to promote workplace talk.

3. Previous Research

This paper draws on research from different traditions. First, the presentation centres on the interrelated themes of the transformation of the public sector and the development of value practices. After this, the third and final theme of corpus methodology and its application to related genres is brought up.

3.1 A Transforming Public Sector

As already mentioned, there seems to be no singular explanation to the emergence of policy texts in the public administration, but some studies point to a transformation of traditional bureaucracy as an impact factor (Clegg 2011; Reed 2011); a transformation that affects both discursive patterns and the roles of civil servants. The introduction of NPM regimes on a global scale (eg. Diefenbach 2009) has had massive effects on managerial and ethical practices within the public sector, one aspect being the appropriation of market values and practices (Fairclough 1993). The educational sector has often been a case in point for studies on that topic. Mautner (2005) presents an overview over research on entrepreneurial university ideals, and in the Swedish context, Ledin and Machin (2015) draw the attention to neo-liberal influences at Swedish universities. In this 'discourse-driven' public sector, language plays an important part (Fairclough 2003: 104), often in form of guidelines, policy texts or promotional texts. Such documents affect conditions for employees, who are, as groups and individuals, held accountable for being motivated and disciplined, but at the same time restricted by institutional policy (Cameron 2000). In the public sector, Alvesson and Willmott (2002) point to discursive identity construction and demonstrated participation as distinctive features of the self-monitoring that is expected from employees. Within the neo-bureaucratic organizations that they study, policy texts and value practices can function as integral tools in such self-monitoring practices. In a Danish Study, Åkerström Andersen and Born (2012) identify the changing role of the public servant in a working environment where the public authority declines responsibility for making staff members feel included, leaving it up to the individual to show initiative and make oneself relevant.

The emergence of policy texts, as well as other new texts and genres, is a significant effect of the discourse-driven new regime. Mulderrig (2011: 53) sees policy discourse as monitoring devices, being 'intrinsically hortatory' and designed to direct actions or behaviour. In a management type referred to as *soft power*, policy texts operate through 'attraction and persuasion' (ibid.: 52). In a similar vein, Rehnberg (2014), relates *storytelling* in Swedish public

administration and in the private sector to a type of governance where it is crucial to influence attitudes. Both policy texts and corporate storytelling resembles what Christensen (2016) refers to as auto-communication, where members of an organisation are senders as well as receivers of their own message. Auto-communication, according to this theory, can fuel the perception of a good reputation of one's own workplace, as well as pride of being connected to it.

One specific type of policy text, mission statements, uses core values to inspire and motivate, and first person plural pronouns to foster affiliation and identification, according to Swales and Rogers (1995: 227) who, in an early study of the genre, find core values like *competent*, *creative*, *enthusiastic*, *leading* and *profitable* in corporate mission statements. A number of studies have taken interest in mission statements and related genres (e.g., Koller 2011, on how professional identities are being constructed in such texts), which reveal similarities between corporate mission statements and the PV texts of the public sector. Based on this research, it seems reasonable to conclude that the textual patterns of PV texts are influenced by commercial practices.

3.2 Value Practices and Core Values

When market ideals influence the public sector, for instance in the form of genres with (partly) commercial provenance, new ideals are added while traditional values prevail, which makes the changes *additions*, rather than *substitutions* of values (Wæraas 2010: 529; Salminen and Mäntysalo 2013: 175). Van der Wal et al. (2008), find different sets of values connected to government and business, respectively, but also identify a common core of values for both cultures, which include *accountability*, *reliability* and *efficiency*. Carr (1999: 14) describes the changing sets of values as a risk and argues that it 'would be naive to place too much emphasis on the personal ethics of the individual (...) when the values of managerialism and business are hegemonic in the public services'. Carr argues a need for other mechanisms to uphold standards of conduct, and points to increased protection of 'whistle-blowers' as a welcome step in this direction.

Studies of what kind of values are promoted in the public sector once again prioritize higher education. Wæraas and Lerøy Sataøen (2018) study core value statements published by Scandinavian higher education institutions and identify national patterns, but also values used in all three countries (Denmark, Norway and Sweden). The most frequent core values, *quality*, *respect* and *diversity*, are described as values to which any organization could subscribe (ibid.: 13). Wæraas and Lerøy Sataøen (2018: 12) confirm results of Lerøy Sataøen (2015), which showed Norwegian and Swedish universities conforming to a standard repertoire of generic values in their core value statements: *openness/transparency*, *diversity*, *quality*, *critical* and *commitment*.

The public sector as a whole remains less well investigated. Wæraas (2010: 530) acknowledges a 'paucity of research on the values that public organizations [...] use', but there are a few studies, among them the previously mentioned Van der Wal et al. (2008), who attempt to classify public sector values. Kernaghan (2003: 712) establishes a typology of values and distinguishes between *ethical*, *democratic*, *professional* and *people* values.

There is no theoretical foundation for this categorization, and the categories are not mutually exclusive, but the model is a longed-for opportunity to discuss core values in a systematic manner. Wæraas (2010) applies these categories in a study of core values of regulative institutions and find a clear emphasis on people-related and professional values. Based on this result, the earlier claim that core values are unique, since they are related to the history and practices of an organization (Selznick 1957), is discussed. Later scholars suggest that values and identity are not as essential as previously assumed (Wæraas 2010: 529).

The PV texts of the Swedish public administration are good examples of the 'new' work life outlined in Cameron (2000) where numerous types of talk are encouraged. A majority of civil servants discuss PV texts, and a frequent topic in those discussions are how PV texts help the authority to reach its goals (Nyström Höög and Björkvall 2018: 30). Civil servants also see the PV as help when they meet citizens and when they cooperate as staff (ibid.: 28). However, civil servants do not connect PV texts to the management of the authority, as could be expected from Mulderrig's (2011) understanding of policy texts.

3.3 Corpus Methods in CGA and CDA

The choice of corpus methods in this study is motivated by a wish to reach a better understanding of the core value words. Corpus methods, an established and important part of CDA methodology (Baker et al. 2008; Mautner 2016), offers opportunities for both quantitative and qualitative perspectives, enables detailed studies of both frequencies and individual occurrences of search words and can help to reduce researcher bias (Mautner 2016: 156). The analytical tools have been refined within the field of CDA-studies (e.g. Fairclough 1995, 2003; Wodak and Meyer 2001[2016]), and are also suggested as resources in the CGA framework (Bhatia 2017: 55).

A wide range of CDA studies apply corpus methods, covering as different themes as deixis in education policy (Mulderrig 2012) or air pollution in China (Wang 2018). Methodologically relevant here is Mautner's (2005) finding on spoken and written discourse in higher education that *enterprise/enterprising* and *entrepreneur/entrepreneurial* stand out as keywords. Considering the appropriation of market values in the educational sector, this is not surprising, but the result that the keywords carry both positive and negative connotations is noteworthy. The ambiguity of the words make them 'susceptible to processes of semantic appropriation' (ibid.: 95). These words function as a type of buzzwords, useful as appropriating agents with very context sensitive interpretations. Whether words have positive or negative connotations may be phrased as a matter of *semantic prosody* (for a critical discussion, see Hunston 2009). 'Semantic prosody' has been used, among others, by Hunston (2004, 2009) and Partington (2004) and is a concept grounded in corpus linguistics, relating to the co-occurrence of patterns of lexis in 'key word in context' concordance lines. Even if 'semantic prosody' might entail a 'simplistic view of attitudinal meaning' (Hunston 2009: 92), it is a concept which opens for discussion on evaluative polarity, otherwise a phenomenon difficult to grasp.

3.4 Summary

One of the main purposes of this paper is to present an overview of core values, thus adding to research by Kernaghan (2003) and Wæraas (2010) on categorization of values in public administration. Previous research has shown that the use of core values as freestanding words affords discussions among civil servants (Nyström Höög and Björkvall 2018). This study attempts to move forward, using patterns of lexis in PV texts as a way of capturing the meaning of the core values and understand whether they are related to legal principles or whether they represent the type of buzzwords that Mauther (2015) describes, which are context sensitive enough to suit different agendas.

4. *Data and Method*

For the purpose of the ongoing project on 'platforms of values' (cf. note 1), 230 PV and related texts (including texts labelled 'vision', 'strategy', and, in some cases, 'annual report') from 154 Swedish public authorities were collected in the beginning of 2016. Out of this varied text material, 84 texts explicitly using the label *platform of values* or *core values* were selected, and this sub-set of texts form the data for the first two research questions of this paper (Sections 5 and 6). The text sample involve heterogeneous types; by way of example, they vary a great deal in length, measured in number of words. A number of positive values are presented in almost all the texts, but the survey is restricted to core values typographically or verbally highlighted in the texts (cf. Figures 1 and 2). The text sample was manually searched for core values, which were then listed and counted.

For the second part of the study, which looks into the meaning of the most popular core values (section 7), a smaller sample of 47 texts was used. The choice of using only 47 texts in this part of the study has to do with the shifting character of the PV texts. From the sample of 84 texts, two groups were excluded, one being the shortest set of texts where the entire texts consists of the core value words and a headline. The second excluded group is a set of texts where the PV is included in a (much) larger text leading to problems with delimitation and possibly causing the corpus to be less representative (McEnery and Hardie 2012). To investigate this dataset, a corpus-assisted approach was employed, using the *AntConc* software program, a freeware corpus analysis toolkit used for concordancing and text analysis (Anthony 2014).

The 47 texts make up a corpus consisting of 15,887 tokens. One could argue that it is possible to analyse such a small data sample manually (cf. Clark 2007, on small corpora), but the automatic analysis significantly simplified the process of finding the foregrounded core values in other parts of the texts than in the opening lists; an important process as all use of core value words contribute to the understanding of their meaning. A corpus linguistic approach also expands the toolbox of CGA along the lines suggested by Bhatia (2017: 57) and enables an in-depth study of the lexical patterns in PV texts. Lastly, the concordance view offers a view of the lexicon, making it easier for the analyst to notice features not foregrounded by the text design, which may reduce researcher bias (Mautner 2016: 156).

The in-depth analysis of particular core value words is inspired by Hunston (2009) and other works on semantic prosody (cf. McEnery and Hardie 2012: 135). A collocational profile of a word or phrase, how it co-occurs with words or phrases with positive or negative meaning, can contribute to an understanding of the word's connotation. In the case of the PV core value words, we can assume that they have positive connotations, or they would hardly be selected for this type of policy texts. The collocational profile might help to corroborate possible patterns of connotation and give clues to understand the meaning of the ambiguous core value words.

5. Core Values – Frequency and Dispersion

When a Swedish public authority produces its own PV text, there is often not much resemblance to the strict and legal nature of the CBV. Instead, as previously mentioned, a pivotal feature of the PV texts is a list of words or phrases, *core values*. The core values may be referred to in Swedish as *kärnvärden* [core values], *värdeord* [value words], *ledord* [steering words], or they may lack a specific heading.[3] They are always salient in the text, by means of colour or boldness, and are often presented in a bullet point list. Figure 2 shows one example, from the Swedish Radiation Safety Authority, where the core values are *Vederhäftighet* [Substantiality], *Integritet* [Integrity] and *Öppenhet* [Openness], listed under the heading *Våra värdeord är:* [Our value words are:]. The paragraph below the list interprets the word *substantiality*. In the text, it is followed by two paragraphs interpreting the other two core values in a similar manner.
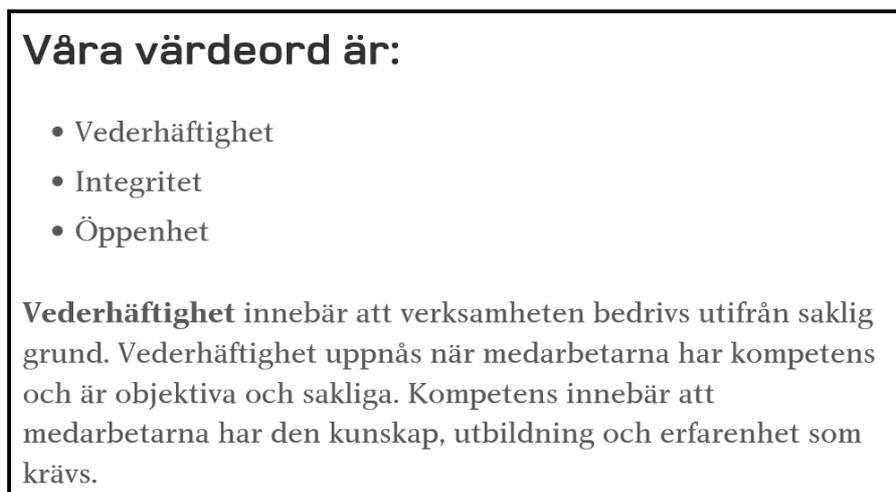
Våra värdeord är:

- Vederhäftighet
- Integritet
- Öppenhet

Vederhäftighet innebär att verksamheten bedrivs utifrån saklig grund. Vederhäftighet uppnås när medarbetarna har kompetens och är objektiva och sakliga. Kompetens innebär att medarbetarna har den kunskap, utbildning och erfarenhet som krävs.

Figure 2. Core values and the interpretation of one core value. The Swedish Radiation Safety Authority. The interpretation of the paragraph below the list in Figure 2 translates into: [Substantiality means that the activity is performed on objective grounds. Substantiality is achieved when the staff is competent, neutral and factual. Competence means that the staff has the knowledge, education and experience that is needed.]

The textual interplay between lists of core values and their interpretations is characteristic for a majority of the 84 texts. As is apparent from the quotation above, this textual pattern results in texts packed with words describing desirable positive qualities. The design of the texts, however, as exemplified in figure 2, highlights the chosen core values. In the mapping of core value

words, all the words emphasised in such a manner in the sample of 84 PV texts were listed. This mapping resulted in a list of 261 core values, or 93 unique core value words. With the number of core values typically being three or four per text, it means that many core values appear in only one PV text. A handful of words have higher frequency, most popular among them is *öppen/öppna* [open] or *öppenhet* [openness], appearing in 21 different PV texts.[4] The core values appearing in more than five PV texts, or differently put, the nine most frequent ones, are presented in Table 1.

Core values	English	Number of texts
Öppen/öppna/öppenhet	Open/openness	21
Respekt/respektfulla	Respect/respectful	14
Engagerade/engagemang	Commitment/committed	13
Ansvarstagande/ansvar	Responsible/responsibility	12
Professionell(t)/professionalism	Professionalism/professional	10
Kompetent(a)/kompetens	Competence/competent	8
Tydlig(a)/tydlighet	Clarity/clear	8
Modig(a)/mod	Courage/courageous	8
Trovärdiga	Trustworthy	7

Table 1. The most frequent core values in Swedish PV texts and the number of texts where they appear. English translation as adjective/noun where both forms appear in the data.

As stands clear from table 1, all the listed core values display general positive qualities. *Professionalism* and *competence* can be understood as related to working life in general. *Respect* and *responsibility* are traditional virtues among civil servants, as perhaps *clarity*, which might relate to the Swedish Language Act (SFS 2009: 600), and the requirement that public authorities must strive for comprehensibility in communication with citizens. *Commitment* and *courage* stand out as core values demanding personal qualities, while *open* or *openness* is the most difficult word to interpret. Without immediate context, it is hard to decide its meaning.

The fact that *open* has become such a popular core value might be related to the phrase *det öppna samhället* [The Open Society], for the well-read connected to Karl Poppers (1980) seminal work on democracy and in certain contexts almost synonymous to a democratic society. The phrase has been in frequent use in discussions on migration in Sweden and in that context, it is clear that the *open society*, with its positive connotations, can be opposed to 'right-wing forces' or 'racism' (Hagren Idevall 2016). A search in a Swedish press database (Retriever Mediearkivet) analysing the first 200 hits of the word *öppen* (open) during one week in January 2019, revealed that nearly 50 % of the instances of *open* referred to tangible objects such as *open doors*, or roads *open*: *vägen öppen igen* [road open again]; *man kan bara ha en landningsbana öppen* [it is only possible to keep one landing strip open]; *en*

dörr till kassaskåpet stod öppen [a door to the safety deposit was open]. Another concrete use of the word relates to different kinds of information sources that are open. In almost 20% of the cases, *open* was included in fixed collocations: *det säljs knark på öppen gata* [drugs are sold in broad daylight (lit. on open street)]. The remaining uses describe different kinds of *openness* as a state of mind: Openness as not being shy, typically people who are open with conditions of disease and distress; people who are open to criticism; people open for discussions and solutions, and lastly people who hold the door open for different possibilities: *han är öppen för förlikning* [he is open for settlement].[5]

The word is clearly polysemous, and according to Hunston (2004: 6), it is possible in such cases that one meaning is evaluative while others are not. As the press data show, all the observed instances confirm a positive evaluative aura of the word. Whether a road is (re)*opened* or someone is being *open* about his or her illness, it is a positive evaluation. Circular as the argument might be, what is consistent about the word *open* is its positive connotations, and that is exactly why the word is useful in the PV context. A core value has to have a positive aura, but its meaning might remain imprecise.

As many as 58 of the core value words occur in just one text and could potentially be characteristic for the task of that authority. The correlation between an authority's activities and its core values seems to be faint, however. In an analysis of a sample of 40 PV texts from the same data as this paper Leibring Svedjedal (2016: 22) grouped the core values into seven semantic categories and found the category *verksamhetsrelaterat* [related to activities of specific authority] the least frequent one. Most of the core value words could, rather similar to table 1, be categorized as *kunskap, kvalitet och kompetens* [knowledge, quality and competence], which can be understood as a description of *how* the work is done, rather than *what* the work concerns. This corresponds to the discussion of the focus group, where participants agreed that the PV texts relate to 'the how' of the work: *Verksamhet det är vadet, värdegrund är huret och visionen är målet* (Activity is *the what*, platform of values is *the how* and the vision is the goal) (Nyström Höög and Björkvall 2018).

6. CBV and PV Texts, a Comparison of Values

CBV consists of six broad value principles. Some of these occur as core values in PV texts as well, such as *efficiency* and *service*. Most of them do not, and there is a difference in specificity. The principle of *respect*, in CBV articulated as 'Respect for equality, freedom and dignity' is in the PV texts usually presented as *respect*, without determination, or as 'respect for equality' and 'respect for the individual' in one case each. The different sets of documents seem to describe slightly different values.

The CBV principles all refer to concepts vital for the public sector in different ways. D*emocracy*, *legality* and *objectivity* all refer to different aspects of abiding the law and heeding to ideals of traditional Weberian bureaucracy, while the other principles refer to aspects that are more specific. *Free formation of speech* and *respect for equality, freedom and dignity* are ethical

values, while *efficiency and service* represent professional values. Along the lines of this reasoning, the six CBV principles form three different categories to which the 93 core values can be grouped, as shown in Figure 3 where core values not related to CBV are marked *uncategorized*. The categories are similar to Kernaghan's (2003), and as in his study, based on the data rather than on theoretical principles.
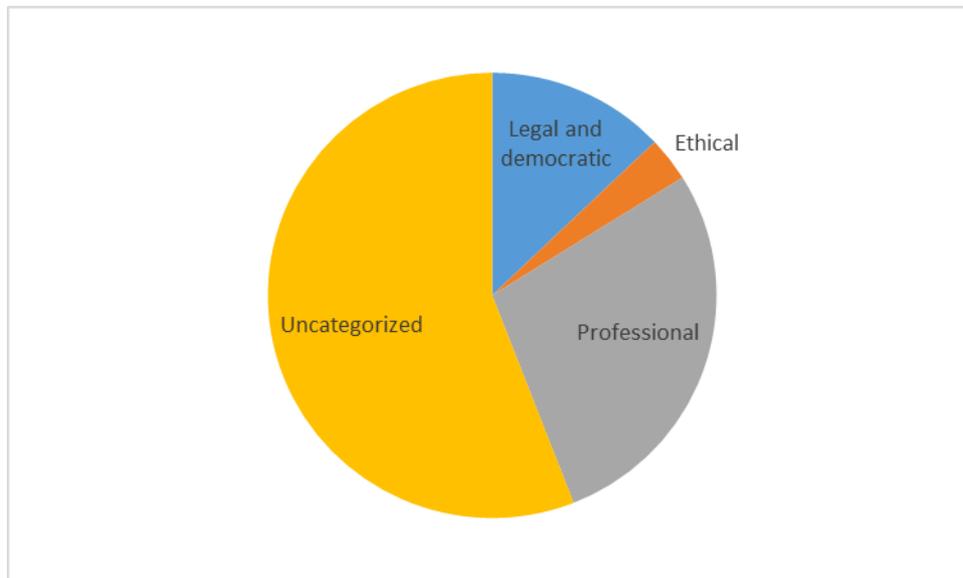

Figure 3. Core values distributed according to the principles of CBV

Figure 3 shows that the principles of CBV are not equally foregrounded in core values of PV texts. The ethical values, *respect for equality, freedom and dignity* and *free formation of speech* seem to have the lowest priority when core values are chosen, the principle of free speech not being acknowledged at all. The principle of *efficiency and service*, categorized here as professional values in line with Kernaghan (2003), is clearly the most observed one. Many of the core values relate to citizen encounters, and the ambition to be service minded and compliant in such encounters: *tydlighet* [clarity], *omtanke* [concern], *nyttiga* [useful] and *hjälpsamhet* [helpfulness]. This seems in line with civil servants perceiving the PV as helpful in meeting citizens (Nyström Höög and Björkvall 2018).

A large number of core value words do not relate to the legal foundation of the public sector, as represented by CBV, but promote other qualities (uncategorized). The uncategorized values in the chart can be grouped into four types:

- relating to personal traits or desired atmosphere at the workplace, such as *positiv attityd* [positive attitude], *samarbete* [cooperation], *lekfullhet* [playfulness], *mod* [courage] or *social förmåga* [social skills]

- relating to competition or to the authority's positive image, such as *offensive* [pushy], *affärsmässig* [business like] and *drivkraft* [motivation]

- relating to authority-specific activities, such as *leveranssäkerhet* [secure delivery] and *klientnära* [near client]

- vague or ambiguous core values such as *delaktighet* [participation], *helhetssyn* [holistic view], *lärande* [learning] and *open/openness*.

The first of these four groups is the largest, comprising of 26 out of the 52 core values uncategorized in Figure 3. These could be described as 'people values', using Kernaghan's terms, and seem to add requirements on the public servant, in relation to legal demands.

7. PV Texts from Swedish Public Authorities as a Small Corpus

For the purpose of the third research question, which aims at a better understanding of the core values, the subset of 47 PV texts were studied as a small corpus, consisting of 15,887 tokens and 2,874 types. This approach offers an overview of the data which shows how salient the core values are in the texts as a whole. This is important, since it shows whether the foregrounded core values are actually representative for the texts. Further, the concordance view may help to interpret semantically vague core value words by means of context. This is of particular interest in relation to the world *open* since it is the most frequent core value. In the following section, word frequencies are presented as an overview of the data, and further on, frequencies and collocations of the most popular core values and of the CBV principles are discussed.

The word frequency list shows, as can be expected, that the most frequent words are function words (Table 2). The high frequency of *och* [and] reveals a pattern of phrasing in the PV texts, where positive qualities often are paired together: *ett jobb ger kraft och förutsättningar till skapande och växande* [a job gives power and preconditions for creation and growth]; *öppenhet för delaktighet och medskapande* [openness for participation and co-creation]. The fact that *we* is very frequent is evident already from a close reading, since the phrase 'we are + core value' is recurrent (cf. Nyström Höög 2017; Björkvall 2018), but the high frequency of both vi [*we*] and vår [*our*], which is distinctive for the PV texts in relation to other public sector texts, is perhaps best understood in relation to the purpose of constructing a joint identity at the authority (Nyström Höög and Björkvall 2018: 28), as in Example 1.

(1) *[Vår] värdegrund är de gemensamma normer och förhållningssätt som vi som myndighet prioriterar för att nå våra mål.*

[The platform of values for [our agency] are the common norms and approaches that we as an authority prioritize to reach our goals.]

Rank	Frequency	Word	Translation
1	1193	och	and
2	543	vi	we
3	420	att	to (infinitive marker)
4	382	för	for
5	356	är	are
6	322	i	in
7	292	som	as
8	221	en	a/an
9	212	med	with
10	203	vår	our
11	191	på	on
12	172	till	to
13	156	av	of
14	148	ska	should
15	132	det	the
16	127	ett	a/an
17	124	våra	our
18	123	värdegrund	platform of values
19	107	vårt	our
20	105	den	the

Table 2. Word frequencies in the PV Corpus, rank 1-20 [6]

Among the content words, the most frequent is värdegrund [platform of values]. It is not surprising that these texts 'talk about themselves' (cf Christensen 2016 on auto-communication). PV texts are a new genre, and it is natural in the process of establishment to repeatedly present oneself: *'Vår värdegrund beskriver värden som genomsyrar hela verksamheten'* [Our platform of values describes values that permeate our entire operation]. This pattern is in line with Vaara et al. (2010: 690), who describe self-authorization as a distinctive feature of the strategy text they studied: 'the strategy communicated its own importance'. The second most frequent content word is verksamhet [activity][7], while the third most frequent content word actually reflects a value, ansvar [responsibility] (rank 28, 66 tokens), also one of the most frequent core values (cf. Table 1). Respekt [respect] also ranks high, 31, with 54 tokens: Vi visar respekt för varandras åsikter och olikheter [We show respect for each other's opinions and differences]. Responsibility and respect then, appear to be values promoted not only in the top core values but also in the texts altogether. Interestingly, the everyday word arbete [work] occurs in between responsibility and respect. The word frequencies reveal a slightly different, and more 'down to earth' approach, than the top core values; Responsibility, respect, work and activity paint a different picture of everyday life in the public sector than openness, commitment and courage.

The remaining core values in Table 1 are, as mentioned, less frequent in the corpus. Open (including inflected forms) and openness stand out. Öppenhet [openness] appears 31 times, as in Arbetsplatsen ska präglas av öppenhet [the work place should be characterized by openness]; Öppenhet innebär att vi lyssnar, kommunicerar och ger feedback [Openness means that we listen, communicate and give feedback], while öppen [open] appears 35 times, as in Jag är öppen och tydlig med min egen synpunkt [I am open and clear with my own point of view]; vara en öppen, kompetent och drivande myndighet [be an open, competent and impelling authority]. The other core values from Table 1 have less than 20 tokens (clarity, commitment, courage, responsibility, competence) or less than 10 tokens (trustworthy, professional). This means that these words are hardly mentioned at all besides being foregrounded as core values.

The core values are neither more nor less frequent in the texts than the CBV principles. *Service, democracy, objectivity, legality* and *efficiency* all have between 9 and 19 tokens in the corpus. This includes the principle *free formation of opinions* which is so strikingly absent from the emphasised core values of the PV texts. In the corpus, *free formation of opinion* occurs 13 times. All these instances, however, are direct or indirect quotes either from the Common Basic Values or from the Swedish Constitution: *Den svenska folkstyrelsen bygger på fri åsiktsbildning* [Swedish Democracy is founded on the free formation of opinion] (The Constitution of Sweden 2013: 3). In comparison to the other principles of the CBV, the principle of free formation of opinion appears to be rephrased and interpreted to a lesser extent than the other principles, since it is always quoted. When free formation of opinion is mentioned, it is simply to state that this principle applies. Two plausible synonyms of 'free formation of speech', *yttrandefrihet* [freedom of speech] and *meddelarfrihet* [freedom to supply information] appears once each, both in the same document from a state university.

(2)   *I Sverige råder offentlighetsprincipen, där öppenhet är ett betydelsefullt nyckelord. Det är samtidigt viktigt att vi iakttar de sekretessbestämmelser som gäller för verksamheten. Meddelarfrihet och meddelarskydd innebär ökad sannolikhet att eventuella missförhållanden blir kända och kan åtgärdas.*

[In Sweden, the freedom of information applies, where openness is an important key word. At the same time, it is important that we abide by the regulations of secrecy that apply to our work. The freedom to supply information and the protection for informants mean an increased probability for deficiencies to be brought to light and corrected.]

The freedom of information is mentioned as an important principle in this quote, and at the same time, its application is being restricted, since the regulation of secrecy must also be followed. In Example 2, *openness* is related to freedom of information, 'an important keyword'. It is clear, then, that openness can be related to free flow of information in the PV context. Further on, the text continues to discuss *openness,* this time in relation to *playfulness,*

one of the core values uncategorized in relation to CBV principles (Figure 3). The public authority at hand is

(3)   *... övertygade om vikten av att etablera en kreativ miljö och att denna gynnas av öppenhet, frihet inom tydliga ramar, lekfullhet och tillvaratagande av olikheter*

[... convinced of the importance of establishing a creative environment, and that such an environment is promoted by openness, freedom within clear boundaries, playfulness and the taking advantage of differencies]

In Example 3, *openness* is related to workplace atmosphere. As the case of freedom of information above, the openness of the workplace is praised and at the same time restricted. *Openness* must have clear boundaries. The PV texts, with their tendency to group words together in lists or in additive constructions, do not contribute greatly to clarifying the meaning of *open* and *openness*. The quotes in Example 2 and 3 indicate that *openness* can be related to information, which can be given away or withheld. More often it refers to a state of mind, as in *öppenhet – vi är kompetenta och uppriktiga* [openness – we are competent and sincere].

Open often appears in the formulaic lists of PV texts stating how 'we' are: *Vi är öppna och nyfikna* [we are open and curious], *Vi är öppna, tydliga och begripliga* [We are open, clear and comprehensible]. Such 'we are'-phrases are often related to personal behaviour and desired qualities in the workplace. Those aspects remain foregrounded when *open* occurs in other syntactic contexts:

(4)   *Miljön på [...] ska därför vara öppen, tillåtande och uppmuntra till nytänkande*

[The environment at [...] must therefore be open, allowing and encourage innovation]

(5)   *vår relation till varandra på myndigheten [ska] vara öppen för ett positivt och utvecklande arbetsklimat*

[our relation toward one another at the authority [must] be open for a positive and development friendly working climate]

In sum, *open* or *openness* relates to three different aspects: personal behaviour, workplace atmosphere and flow of information. Using the collocates to support interpretation of the word is difficult: *open* occurs most often together with *vi* [we], *är* [are] and *ska* [should] as in the (constructed) prototypical sentence *we should be open*. The polysemous character of the word makes it a good representative of the type of word that Mautner (2005: 95) describes as 'susceptible to processes of semantic appropriation' and those types of words are indications of the trend-sensitive nature of the PV practices. The texts use buzzwords with positive connotations but offer little or

no support as to how these words can be interpreted. Instead, in those cases when *openness* has a tangible meaning, it is also restricted. Be open, but do not reveal too much information.

8. Discussion and Conclusion

This study has shown which core values are frequent in the Swedish PV texts, how these core values relate to the legal foundation of Swedish administration and further that the PV texts as a whole promote a more mundane image of public sector work than the rather jaunty core values.

The most frequent core values describe general positive qualities and seem to contradict Selznick's (1957) claim that values emanate from unique institutional identities. Instead, the PV texts express a conformity to genre ideals across sectors of society, bearing a strong resemblance to mission statements. The types of values promoted in the PV texts confirm Waeraas' (2010) claim that professional and people-related values dominate public institutions. The people-related values imply that PV texts add new values to the workplace ethos laid out in CBV. A plausible explanation, of course, is that public authorities are well aware of the CBV principles and need to add content to make the PV work worthwhile.

Efficiency and service stand out as important values for individual authorities and are articulated in core values. In contrast, ethical values are not prominent, which is surprising since PV practices are often described as ethical work (e.g., Alvesson 2015). One of the ethical core values, *respect*, which is quite frequent, is a vaguer articulation of the CBV principle *respect for equality, freedom and dignity*, while the legal right for Swedish civil servants to formulate their opinion freely is absent among the core values. When *free formation of speech* is discussed, beyond quoting the constitution, it is also restricted. *Openness*, which can refer to free flow of information, is primarily not used in the PV texts in the sense *free formation of speech*. It appears that the democratic right to form an opinion is toned down in the PV texts, which is quite alarming, considering that PV practices play an important part in forming the work of the public authorities, 'the how', to quote the focus group (Nyström Höög and Björkvall 2018).

One critique towards corpus studies (for a discussion, see Partington 2014), is that it is difficult to observe what is absent from a corpus. In this case, the comparative approach, where the CBV provides a point of departure, gives the opportunity to see what principles of the CBS that are not present, or not frequent in the PV data, as in the case of free formation of speech. The concordance view further has enabled insights into the texts beyond the foregrounded bullet lists. Beyond the core values, the PV texts display a more down to earth picture of the public sector, where *work* and *responsibility* are frequent words. A previous study (Nyström Höög and Björkvall 2018) show that civil servants understand PV texts as tools for staff cooperation and citizen encounters. This provides a frame for understanding the emphasis on *efficiency and service*, important values when the civil servants encounter the citizens. In a similar manner, the analytical focus on affordance provides a clearer understanding of the use of polysemous words such as *open*. Such

words, with positive connotations, afford discussions on meaning, while maintaining a positive attitude, and indicate that PV texts are purposefully designed in order to promote spontaneously occurring conversations. The vagueness serves as an invitation, while it can be expected that the discussion also touches upon *work* and *responsibility*, as core content of the texts.

Up to this point, the critical voices in the Swedish context have perceived PV texts as produced in order to create a positive self-image of the authority, and to promote it in competition with other parts of the public sector (Alvesson 2006). The corpus-based analysis presented in this paper adds different perspectives to that criticism, showing that PV texts give a different picture of public administration compared to the legally founded values. The ongoing discussions on core values expected to occur in the workplace are clearly not intended to serve the purpose of informing the public about public administration. Carr's (1999) expectation that the 'new' public sector means an increased support to whistle blowers is put to shame here. Instead, the PV texts reveal a public sector that promotes openness but shuts the door on itself.

This study contributes to an understanding of the public administration, based on detailed analysis of PV texts. However, PV texts are only *one part* of the norms and regulations that public administration adheres to. In order to find out to what extent the core values permeate the everyday work of civil servants, further studies are called upon. The questionnaire survey which is part of this research project (Nyström Höög and Björkvall 2018) indicates that the PV discussions in some workplaces are tied to coercive practices, such as workplace meetings and salary negotiations. This pattern deserves to be looked further into, possibly building on theories of how discourses and genres intertwine in recontextualization (Fairclough 2003; Ledin and Machin 2015). In addition, it would benefit the understanding of the PV practices in public administration, if a thorough study of similar policy work in the private sector was undertaken, preferably with a comparative approach.

Notes

1. The present paper and the data it presents are part of the research project *The archaeology of a new genre: Vision and values texts of public authorities in Sweden,* funded by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (The Swedish foundation for humanities and social sciences) (grant number 015-0119).

2. The number of public authorities in Sweden fluctuates, but was 256 in November 2018, according to Statistics Sweden.

3. The data analysed for this study is Swedish, translations of words and excerpts are made by the author. Since many of the core value words and CBV are referred to throughout the paper, the Swedish original word is not repeated once an English translation has been introduced.

4. Words considered forms of the same root morpheme are listed as the same core value, as with *open* or *openness*. The fact that there are two Swedish forms related to one English adjective is due to the Swedish system of grammatical agreement, where the form of the adjective changes according to grammatical number.

5. The quotations from the database are from different Swedish news papers and news sites. To make the text more readable, sources have been omitted. They are (in running order in this paragraph): Hallands Nyheter (local newspaper), MSN webnews, Lokaltidningen

Stenungsund (local newspaper), Expressen (evening paper, national coverage) and Nyhetsbyrån TT (News Agent).

6. Due to the Swedish system of grammatical agreement, the English word *our* is used as translation for three different words in Table 2 (*vår* (common gender), *vårt* (neuter gender), *våra* (plural)). The gender system also explains why two words are translated into the indefinite article (*a/an*), which in Swedish is *en* (common) or *ett* (neuter).

7. *Verksamhet* is a polysemous and often metonymous word, and can be used for anything that is going on. *Activity* or *enterprise* are equally valid translations, depending on context.

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