



# Street-level bureaucrats under new managerialism: a comparative study of agency cultures and caseworker role identities in two welfare state bureaucracies

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## ABSTRACT

Officials in welfare state bureaucracies face the challenge of negotiating their role identities in the context of changeable organizational priorities and managerial styles. Previous studies have found that the professional values may mediate top-down demands and enable the preservation of professional autonomy also under public management reforms. But how do street-level bureaucrats who lack a common professional or occupational training respond to shifting organizational demands? Based on comparative ethnography, the present article investigates how caseworkers' role identities are conceived and practised in two of the largest state bureaucracies in Sweden, the Social Insurance Agency (SIA) and the Public Employment Service (PES). The article identifies two radically different agency cultures, resulting in rather opposite caseworker role identities. These role identities affect how front-line staff respond to organizational demands, either by focusing externally on client-related outcomes (PES) or internally on organizational output (SIA). The analysis suggests that agency culture may shape caseworker responses to governance in patterned ways, also in the absence of joint professional training or strong occupational communities.

**KEYWORDS:** caseworkers; street-level bureaucracy; discretion; managerialism; organizational culture

## INTRODUCTION

Officials working in welfare state bureaucracies face the challenge of negotiating their role identities in the context of changeable policy priorities, organizational pressures, and managerial styles. New ways of governing the public sector have changed the

conditions for street-level work. For instance, when Lipsky (2010/1980) wrote his seminal book on *Street-level Bureaucracy*, the work of front-line staff was characterized by certain discretion. Since then, street-level bureaucracy has been heavily restructured under the influence of New Public Management (NPM) practices, such as management by objectives

and performance and audit regimes (e.g. Brodtkin 2008, 2011). Organizations and practitioners alike organize and represent themselves as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations (e.g. Power 1997). This change is reflected in the lively discussion of standardization of street-level work versus maintained scope of discretion for caseworkers (e.g. Brodtkin 2011; Evans 2011; Evans and Harris 2004). Attempts to combine NPM and so called post-NPM approaches to management have increased the complexity of public sector organization further (Christensen and Lægread 2010). Both approaches are expressions of new managerialism, constituting different ways of securing organizational loyalty. From management's perspective, discretion could be perceived as a threat to—rather than a prerequisite for—achieving organizational objectives. How have practitioners in welfare bureaucracies of various kinds responded to new forms of management control of the front line?

Previous studies have found that the professional values and institutions of organized professions mediate top-down demands and may enable the preservation of professional autonomy also under public management reforms (e.g. Ackroyd et al., 2007). Indeed, most of the studies arguing that street-level bureaucrats have defended discretionary power and professional values also under NPM come from social work (e.g. Evans 2011; Evans and Harris 2004; Liljegren 2012), where the professionals share a common training, certification, and professional ethics. But how do street-level bureaucrats who lack a common educational background, and do not qualify as a profession, respond to shifting organizational demands?

This article compares caseworker role identities as conceived and practised in two of the largest welfare state bureaucracies in Sweden: The Social Insurance Agency (SIA) and the Public Employment Service (PES). Both these agencies have undergone rather drastic shifts in management styles and priorities during the past decade. However, as we will see, their caseworkers respond very differently to such shifts. The analysis focusses on the ways in which caseworker ideals and norms relate to management objectives, revealing that the two agencies represent very different public sector cultures. The analysis suggests that agency culture mediates caseworker

responses to top-management directives, affecting caseworkers' perceived autonomy and level of discretion in their everyday work as well as shaping what they perceive as 'good' work. By agency cultures we refer to the institutionalized social norms guiding collegial interaction, employee–client interaction as well as the manager–employee interaction at the local offices. By caseworker role identities, we refer to the self-understanding of the interviewees of their role as caseworkers.

The street-level bureaucracy literature has tended to conceive of front-line staff as the outer edge of a hierarchical governance chain (e.g. Lipsky (2010), and focussing primarily on street-level bureaucrats as individuals. The present study suggests that caseworker role identities needs to be understood in their context where formal roles and structural conditions matter (e.g. Lipsky 2010; Johansson 1992) but also, we argue herein, the agency culture in question. This entails acknowledging the social context and the informal structures within bureaucracies (e.g. Selznick 1957; Downs 1967; Sandfort 2000; Riccucci 2005). As Selznick argued, 'a certain amount of social homogeneity is required if subordinate personnel are to be allowed wide discretion in the application of policies to special circumstances' (1957: 114). Agency culture is, we propose, a case in point, shaping caseworker responses to governance in patterned ways, also in the absence of joint professional training or strong occupational communities.

## STREET-LEVEL BUREAUCRACIES UNDER NEW MANAGERIALISM

Organizational change, such as marketization and managerialism (e.g. Evetts 2011; Freidson 2001) have transformed welfare bureaucracies during the last decades. 'Governing by performance'-logic and audit regimes have proved to have huge implications for casework, a key aspect of which is the strong belief in standardization to achieve comparability and control. NPM principles have been found to lead to increased standardization of client assessments (e.g. Caswell, Marston and Larsen 2010; Brodtkin 2011), suppressing the formation of personal relationships with clients (Mik-Meyer 2018). Concern with formal rationality and accountability has been found to increasingly replace professional judgment and

substantive rationality (Lindvert 2006), ‘preserving form without spirit’ (Freidson 2001: 181). Consequently, many studies report organizational constraints on the use of discretion (e.g. Brodtkin 2011; Fransson and Quist 2018), and professional service delivery being increasingly replaced by bureaucratic programme administration (e.g. van Berkel and van der Aa 2012). Managerial-induced ‘organizational professionalism’, primarily concerned with improving organizational performance and building on organizational control of work, has been found to increasingly replace professionalism based on occupational identities and control of work in the welfare sector (Evetts 2011); and studies have reported managerial resistance to strong occupational communities (e.g. Noordegraaf 2007: 763; Ahlbäck Öberg et al. 2016).

Other studies, however, have shown that, even under NPM, front-line staff have defended their discretionary power and professional values (e.g. Brodtkin 2011; Evans 2011; Evans and Harris 2004; Jessen and Tufte 2014). To move beyond an all-or-nothing’ approach in discussing the balance between standardization and professional discretion, researchers have tried to distinguish between different aspects of discretion. Not all aspects of discretion are affected by NPM and standardization (Taylor and Kelly 2006); new forms of ‘hybrid professionalisms’ may be emerging (Noordegraaf 2007, 2015); and organizations may find new ways to create discretion (Evans and Harris 2004: 883). Liljegren argued that social workers may both claim loyalty to their professional codes of ethic and ‘fall back on the opposing form’ with organizational targets and standardized practices, which he spoke of as ‘pragmatic professionalism’ (Liljegren 2012: 309). Thus, professionals find themselves embedded in organizational contexts that ‘limit but do not eliminate professional control’ (Noordegraaf 2007: 772f). Van Berkel (2020) argued that context matters, but that this applies for policy, governance, organizational as well as occupational contexts, the specific configuration of which may shape street-level behaviour in very different ways. Moreover, professionals may apply ‘creative mediation’ to redefine the demands of NPM to support the outcome they desire and are thus not ‘passive victims’ of management reform (van Gestel et al., 2019: 11–13). In their study of front-line social

workers who were engaged in activating social welfare recipients, van Berkel, van der Aa and van Gestel (2010) found that the performance-oriented style of management entailed more room for discretion for these workers; however, due to the low level of institutionalization of activation work as part of the profession, such work tended to be an individual rather than collegial project.

However, most of the studies arguing that caseworkers in street-level bureaucracies have defended their discretion under new forms of public sector governance come from social work (e.g. Evans 2011; Evans and Harris 2004; Liljegren 2012), where staff, in contrast to staff in state agencies, such as the PES and the SIA, share a professional culture based on common training, certification of skills, and shared professional ethics. For instance, Liljegren (2012) argued that social workers’ shared client-focused idea of making the best decision was legitimized through their occupational training, which created knowledge-based freedom within bureaucratic frameworks. Indeed, previous research suggests that the level of professionalization matters for the mediation and reception of management norms, and for the capacity of professionals to preserve autonomy within the organizational system. Van Gestel et al. (2019) found that the full professionals in their study (medical doctors) were more in control of, and more selective in, the adaptation to new forms of management than the representatives of semi-professions (teachers and social policy workers). Similarly, a comparative study of health care, social services, and housing found that it was the least institutionalized area in terms of professional norms, namely housing, that was most affected by new managerialism (Ackroyd et al. 2007).

What about caseworkers in street-level bureaucracies who lack common educational background and professional identity, then? Research on the ways in which discretion is defended in welfare state bureaucracies is scarcer (cf. Molander 2016). One exception is Paulsen’s ethnographic (2018) study of a Swedish PES office. He found employees displaying a high level of pragmatism; they are ‘making the best of it’ (i.e. the organizational standards) to maintain their own wellbeing. This led him to conclude that PES employees are obedient to organizational authorities (Paulsen 2018: 374). A study of national-level

Swedish labour market policy documented a shift in logic from ‘doing the right thing’ to ‘doing things the right way’, where formal rationality tended to replace substantive rationality (Lindvert 2006).

Regarding the Swedish SIA, strong belief in standardizing the evaluation of work capacity has been stressed (e.g. Björnberg 2012). It has been found difficult to implement change towards more discretion and client-centered principles within this agency, owing to a strong organizational culture that values top-down performance measures (Ståhl and Andersson 2018). Fransson and Quist (2018) studied an organizational experiment, in which SIA caseworkers were allowed self-determination to see what happened in such a ‘permissive’ setting. They found signs of increased perceived autonomy, but also that discretion was sometimes used to improve organizational rule-following (Fransson and Quist 2018: 132). The Social Insurance Inspectorate argued the frequent shifts in steering of the SIA tended to be accompanied by disqualification of previous ways of thinking and acting, criticizing the fact that staff training tended to focus only on the latest policy priority rather than their full caseworker role (ISF 2018).

In our interpretation, these studies suggest that organizational culture—or as we put it here, agency culture—may mediate responses to managerialism also in the absence of strong occupational and professional communities. The significance of pervading work norms and culture has been pointed to in previous research of street-level bureaucracies (e.g. Sandfort 2000; Riccucci 2005), but has been rarely explored beyond staff with a common occupational training or community. Maynard-Moody and Musheno argued that street-level workers form a special ‘organizational caste’ that shares institutional culture and identities (2000: 353). They spoke here of street-level workers in general, rather than noting that street-level bureaucrats may form different ‘castes’.

The present article offers a comparative study of the caseworker role identities as embraced and practised at the Swedish PES and the SIA. The argument here is that agency culture is key to understanding caseworker role identities as well as the way in which caseworkers respond to managerialism and shifting management objectives. The PES and SIA caseworkers have no common training previous to

employment and only short on-the-job training sessions, and no certification of knowledge and skills. Nevertheless, as we will see, caseworkers in the respective agency display and practise different but consistent caseworker ideals reflected in their view and use of discretion, their sense of mission and purpose, and their way of relating to managers, clients and external parties. In order to explore how these different agency cultures, largely shared by caseworkers and local managers alike, contribute to shaping casework and mediate responses to top-down directives, this article offers a rare comparative ethnography of welfare state bureaucracies.

Before introducing the study and in order to understand the organizational complexity under which SIA and PES caseworkers work, we first describe the structural and contextual similarities and differences in the two organizations, especially in terms of management ideologies and the formal assignments.

### THE ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

The role identities of front-line staff in large welfare state bureaucracies is particularly interesting to investigate, due to their size, complex governmental mission and system of control. The SIA and PES are two of the largest state agencies in Sweden, constituting key institutions in the Swedish welfare state and in the enactment of Swedish welfare and activation policies. The SIA is responsible for administering social insurances but the present study limits its focus to staff administering the health insurance. The PES is responsible for administering activity grants and ensuring that the unemployed are active job-seekers, fulfilling the requirements for receiving unemployment insurance benefits.

More precisely, the role of SIA caseworkers is (1) to make assessments and decisions regarding individuals’ sickness benefit eligibility and (2) if needed, to cooperate with stakeholders, such as healthcare professionals, employers and PES officials, in coordinating the rehabilitation process (Social Insurance Code 2010: 10). The SIA caseworkers are required to apply an officially standardized method comprising standard time limits for assessing individuals’ entitlement to sickness benefits and return to work (the ‘rehabilitation chain’, as an expression of reinforced activation principles in the health insurance).

Sickness benefits may end after a period of six months if a person is considered to have work ability in another occupation. Under the period studied, the SIA caseworkers were organized in teams (e.g. [Hollertz, Jacobsson and Seing 2018](#); [Holmgren Caicedo, Mårtensson Hansson and Tamm Hallström 2015](#)). The administration of health insurance also includes support functions, such as insurance medical advisers and insurance ‘specialists’.

The PES is commissioned to improve the functioning of the labour market by: (1) effectively bringing together job-seekers with those who are looking for labour, (2) prioritizing those who are far from the labour market, and 3) contributing to a steady increase in long-term employment ([Ordinance 2007: 1030](#)). PES caseworkers are organized based on different labour market measures and client needs, e.g., job-seekers with disabilities, long-term unemployed, new arrivals and immigrants, and supported employment. PES staff may also be responsible for contacts with employers or be ‘specialists’ working with job-seekers with disabilities. In contrast to the SIA, which during our study period minimized direct client meetings, all the PES caseworkers frequently encountered their clients, in physical customer centres, workplace visits, on the Web, phone, and in chat and video meetings. Digitalization had begun to be implemented but not got as far as at the SIA.

Thus, the caseworkers’ formal assignment in both agencies is that they should both guide clients in need and deal with welfare resources in the most appropriate manner. Nevertheless, PES caseworkers have a more complex work task as, in addition to eligibility determination, they have a large number of labour market measures available, which requires a certain flexibility in devising individually tailored interventions and job matching. The SIA caseworkers, on the other hand, mainly need to assess whether a person qualifies for sickness benefits—which is a ‘yes or no’-decision—even if the job task also entails coordination of rehabilitation support when needed. It is well-known that task complexity increases the need for discretionary judgments (e.g. [Meyers and Lehmann Nielsen 2012](#)). The structural differences between the two agencies that [Johansson](#) identified in 1992 by and large still applies: He found the street-level bureaucrats at the SIA to be more strictly rule-bound and having a more narrow field of

specialization, a greater number of cases and stronger pressure on a quick decisions-making than the PES ones ([Johansson 1992: 73f](#)). Moreover, the fact that the PES has two clients to handle and match—job-seekers and employers—makes their work more difficult to standardize.

At the time of study, most caseworkers at both the SIA and the PES had a university degree. This varies with tenure, as over time, the qualification requirements for applicants have increased. At the same time, according to the HR managers interviewed, the applicant’s field of study is not of importance, as caseworkers are supposed to work with similar cases, regardless of whether their field of studies is, for instance, law, social work or economics. For the PES applicants, their external network of potential employers is seen as a resource too.

Both agencies are governed by annual letters of regulation, the content and degree of detail of which vary according to current government priorities. Moreover, both agencies have faced rather drastic changes in management styles and governance the last decades. The Swedish public sector is heavily influenced by management styles imported from the private sector; management by objectives and results was implemented throughout the public sector already in the early 1990s, also resulting in a strong emphasis on audit culture (e.g. [Lindvert 2006](#)). While the drawbacks of NPM have long been well-known to scholars, the problem came to the attention of the broader public in Sweden in 2013, initiating a political discussion about the ongoing deprofessionalization of the public sector and the need to restore trust in professionals. The Swedish government (formed by the Social Democrats and the Green Party in 2014) launched a campaign stating ‘let the professionals be professional’ ([Fransson and Quist 2018: 12](#)) and formed a government delegation on Trust-based Governance. Initially, this government delegation focused on the welfare sector: schools, healthcare and elderly care with the aim to restore trust in the professionals and allowing them scope for discretion (see e.g. [SOU 2018: 47](#)). Later, the government added a directive to the delegation to also suggest ways to implement trust-based governance in state agencies, one of which was the PES ([SOU 2019: 43](#)). Nevertheless, already before this government delegation, post-bureaucratic

management ideals had been in vogue, such as management by values (rather than by objectives and performance). Lean management has been implemented widely across the public sector in Sweden (Innovationsrådet 2012). In our view, both NPM and so-called post-NPM are new managerial techniques to secure goal fulfilment and exert control of front-line staff.

In the two agencies studied, implementing trust- and value-based governance preceded the government delegation, based on the initiative of individual GDs. Both the SIA and the PES initiated comprehensive re-organizations and changes in internal governance arrangements to move away from strict management by objectives and detailed, hierarchical steering of caseworkers. The SIA implemented such organizational changes during the period 2012–2016, naming the reform ‘Our Joint Journey’, yet implementing it in a rather top-down manner (e.g. Holmgren Caicedo, Mårtensson Hansson and Tamm Hallström 2015; Fransson and Quist 2018; Ståhl and Andersson 2018). At the PES, organizational change was introduced two years later (2014–2021), framed as ‘The Renewal journey’ (reflecting the fact that both agencies had used to the same management consultancy firm). Both reforms entailed an emphasis on management by values, notions of coaching leadership and self-leadership among staff, continuous improvement and other Lean management principles. In both cases, the ambition was to reassert trust in the employees and their professional judgement. Nevertheless, the reforms did not replace objectives or targets altogether but sought to avoid the most problematic usages of them away, supplementing them by other managerial interventions, such as Lean and culture management.

Meanwhile, a shift and return towards stricter management by objectives and results took place at the SIA in 2016, when the centre-left government introduced a precise numerical target for reducing the sickness absence rate in Sweden, e.g., stating that ‘the sickness benefit rate may not exceed 9.0 days per individual and per year in 2020’ (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs 2016). In achieving this target, the SIA front-line staff have a key role as gatekeepers to health insurance. Thus, in 2016, a newly appointed Director General of the SIA returned to strict

management by objectives, and implemented measures to increase the ‘quality’ of caseworkers’ assessment of sick-leave benefits, ensuring correct application of the law to ensure that ‘the right person receives the right compensation’ (SIA 2016: 2) and at the right time. Thus, we studied one agency that had started moving away from post-bureaucratic ideology (the SIA) and one that was in the middle of it—where the new management philosophy of self-leadership was still a strong organizational ideal (the PES). The frequent shifts in specific management goals and styles—as well as the fact that managerial interventions into their practice remains a constant—are challenging for caseworkers in both agencies. However, how caseworkers relate and respond to such change depends, in part, on the shared work culture which form the ideals they embrace, thus their role identities as caseworkers.

#### DATA AND METHOD

The present article approaches caseworker role identities empirically (and inductively), investigating the identifications and ideals embraced and practised at the two agencies under study. Ethnographical work, building on observations as well as qualitative interviews, enables such an analysis. This results in a multifaceted view of caseworkers’ role identities, including role-expectations, ideals concerning good job performance, views on and use of discretion, relationships with clients; managers and external parties; emotional rewards at work; as well as loyalty to current management goals.

The analysis is based on ethnographic observations of daily work and qualitative semi-structured interviews at five local SIA offices and two PES offices located in two Swedish regions. The SIA is a highly centralized agency and for such an extensive (ethnographic multi-site) study as ours, consent had to go through the head office. A note of caution is that 4 out of 5 offices were performing above the average in terms of reaching the objective of 9.0 sick days as annual average; such offices have more time to take part in time-consuming research but it could not be ruled out that the head office wished to make a good impression on researchers, a risk we are well aware of in the analysis. With the PES, we could negotiate access directly with the local managers. The

criteria here was to study PES and SIA offices in the same region, thus operating in largely the same structural context. Due to differences in organizational structures, the number of offices studied differs. The reason for studying several offices of each agency was to make sure that findings did not reflect as much specificities at one local office as agency culture more generally. In addition, the analysis draws on 82 semi-structured interviews with staff at local offices (44 interviews at the PES; 38 at the SIA): caseworkers, their local managers as well as local specialists.<sup>1</sup>

For the ethnographic observations, we followed the method of ‘go along’ or ‘shadowing’ practitioners (Czarniawska 2007), in this case the individual caseworkers in their daily work (but excluding direct client interaction for confidentiality reasons). We also observed the collegial settings, such as staff training, management training, staff meetings, manager meetings, as well as interaction in lunchrooms, office spaces and receptions. At the SIA, we also observed team meetings, a working method that is institutionalized there. The ethnographic observations on the one hand served to validate what was expressed in the interviews with respect to ideals and practices (including relations to clients, managers, and current organizational goals). On the other hand, the observations of daily life in these agencies were important in their own right, to capture the agency culture—the social norms in the workplaces—in order to see how dominant culture shapes the role identities also beyond formal assignment and policy, the understanding of which requires ethnographic research. For instance, ethnographic observation made visible the ways in which caseworkers related to managers, clients and other external actors, in formal meetings as well as informal settings, also capturing the work norms and agency culture reflected in jargon and jokes.

In addition, 16 background interviews were conducted at the SIA head office in Stockholm and one group interview was conducted with higher officials at the Ministry of Social Affairs to obtain background information on organizational governance at the SIA. At the central level of PES, six interviews were conducted at the head PES office, as well as one interview at the Ministry of Employment. In total, the interview material for the present article consists of

106 interviews. Data collection took place during 2015–17.

The analysis builds on an inductive, grounded-theory-inspired approach in terms of its two-stage coding procedure, using an initial coding of a descriptive reading of the interview transcripts and field notes, section by section and line by line, followed by more focused coding (Charmaz 2014). Focused coding was used to distinguish patterns and differences in the data, e.g., instrumental versus pragmatic work culture, introverted versus extroverted orientation, and formal versus informal responsibility at work, providing theoretical analyses closely connected to the field. Such developed codes and patterns helped in distinguishing the important differences in agency culture and caseworker role identities at the two agencies.

## FINDINGS

### Agency cultures at the PES and the SIA

#### *A culture of loyalty versus a culture of questioning*

Fieldwork and interviews with caseworkers and managers revealed notable differences in agency cultures at the PES and the SIA, manifested in the daily work and social interaction at the local offices. The analysis identifies a loyalty culture at the SIA that emphasizes satisfying internal values and organizational needs, and thus adapting smoothly to shifting management objectives, versus a culture of questioning at the PES that focuses on external values and on satisfying job-seekers’ and employers’ needs.

The dominant work culture at the SIA was characterized by a strong ideal and ambition ‘to do things the right way’ according to formal rationality, and to allegiantly follow and implement current organizational directives from above. Prevailing norms were adaptability to internal changes and demands set by both local and central management, and acting in compliance with the law, regulations and guidelines. In addition, the productivity goal and numerical target of ‘9.0’ was integrated into the organizational governance of the caseworkers and ‘infused’ as a guiding norm into everyday interactions. The law, however, and thus the formal mission of SIA caseworkers, had remained the same since 2008.

The everyday work of a SIA caseworker consists of several internal meetings, e.g., attending meetings with their team, the managers, insurance specialists, and insurance physicians. The organizational gatherings can be understood as organizational rituals through which caseworkers are moulded into the agency culture and in which norms are typically produced and delivered top-down and then reproduced by caseworkers. In particular, the staff meetings offered local management a direct opportunity to spread and integrate current goals and direction into the organization as well as to create a feeling of togetherness and meaningfulness at the workplace around a shared goal. For instance, in one staff meeting, a local manager stated that ‘9.0 represents a low and stable sickness absence rate and this target currently has a high priority on the government’s political agenda and thereby also for the SIA’ (observation, staff meeting). At another meeting, a local manager emphasized to the caseworker audience that ‘you should know that 9.0 is a reasonable sickness absent rate. [...] Our most important task is to come down to a reasonable level of the sick leave benefit rate’ (observation, staff meeting). The managers’ view trickles down and becomes important among SIA caseworkers as well: During informal discussion at another meeting, one caseworker said ‘I have the feeling we’re on the right track’. Their manager had just reported that the number of rejections had increased, admitting that this may lead to negative media reactions but emphasized that the Director General will be on their side and give them support. These observations illustrate what is important for SIA employees: to act in line with internal management requirements and to know that important values are defined internally, not externally by the media or client needs.

The numerical targets and audit culture at the SIA serve as a sign that caseworkers are ‘doing things the right way’ and, therefore, evoke a sense of security as well as pride in their work. Follow-ups by managers were not perceived as control as much as help to improve and be guided by existing organizational performance indicators. The interviewed caseworkers were highly aware of the strict follow-ups on each caseworker’s productivity. Some caseworkers reflected quite critically on what the measurement actually meant but they saw no other option than to

follow what was being measured as ‘only the things that can be evaluated are important’, as one SIA caseworker put it. Caseworkers described feelings of insecurity at work, and thus appreciated the support given by specialists as ‘coaches’ in the organized teamwork, confirming that they assessed cases as intended by the organization: “You get in like in black and white, ‘am I thinking the right way?’”, one caseworker told.

In sum, the agency culture at the SIA is that of loyalty with the current—and regularly shifting—organizational objectives, and a desire among caseworkers to deliver what managers ask for in a rather instrumental fashion. This does not mean that there were no critical voices among the interviewees. The point here is that the dominant agency culture—that of loyalty and compliance—did not allow any critical voices to come to the surface in the collegial settings. The design of staff meetings illustrates the limited scope for discussion and questioning of management directives: the management representatives often sat together in a distant position close to a stage where the presenter was standing while caseworkers were spread at tables directed to the stage. During the meetings, the atmosphere often was a bit subdued and caseworkers were most of the time silently listening, while management representative did the talking.

In contrast, at the local PES offices, observed staff meetings were more informal, noisy and unstructured in nature. The atmosphere was characterized by scepticism and resistance towards current management directives (from the local as well as central level), as caseworkers themselves had a clear picture of what is important and needs to be prioritized. The agency culture at the PES is thus in clear contrast to that at the SIA, where caseworkers displayed more insecurity in relation to their own work and acceptance of organizational demands. When faced with organizational pressure, PES caseworkers expressed their point of view and displayed reflexivity through their use of humour, sarcasm, and irony. For instance, several interviewees saw the top-down attempt to implement the management philosophy of self-leadership as a joke; they had felt like self-leaders all along:

There was quite a lot of nagging going on for a while, about self-leadership. God, we didn’t



talk about anything else. It was kind of fun, that there was such a thing. I didn't attend any meeting, we have too many meetings, it's boring. But then, I didn't attend [a meeting] and one of the managers came: 'You weren't there'. 'No', I said, 'I took on my self-leadership, thought about it and found out I don't need it'. (caseworker, PES)

In comparison with the SIA, the relations between PES caseworkers and local managers appeared to be more relaxed and equal. Staff meetings were often led by the caseworkers, with a non-fixed chairperson role that alternated between them, and managers were more in the background. One caseworker described how angry she got when the managers came and 'kidnapped the meeting': 'They [the managers] only have one point on the meeting agenda and yet, the managers took over the whole meeting.' This caseworker's frustration reflects the way staff meetings were perceived and understood among caseworkers at the PES: as the agency's most important internal meeting where work-related topics should be discussed from the bottom-up.

The existing culture of questioning management directions 'from above' reflects the ideal of autonomy at local PES offices. The autonomy ideal is salient in the PES agency culture, reflecting organizational norms about how the work tasks should be performed, manifested in a pragmatic orientation towards their work task:

We can't break the rules. Our work needs to follow the rule of law. But, in practical terms, I still experience that we have a lot of professional freedom. I can still decide and steer things how I want, within certain frameworks. (caseworker, PES)

In contrast, SIA caseworkers described their work as being largely governed by regulations, fixed 'processes' and 'guidelines', with strict recommendations for how long clients should be on sick leave based on their respective diagnoses. Notable here were the positive attitudes towards rules, regulations, and administrative support that the caseworkers expressed, as they were perceived to facilitate their work. One local SIA manager stressed that the caseworkers who

'like discretion' have changed job, for instance moved to the PES:

The ones [caseworkers] I still have here, they like frameworks and rules, to know what is right and what is wrong. They don't like having discretion [...] I have three [caseworkers] who left to work at the Public Employment Service instead, where they feel they have this discretion. (local manager, SIA)

The above quote also exemplifies the existing tensions and expressed notions concerning what takes place at the 'other' welfare state bureaucracy. The SIA managers described how caseworkers at the PES are acting like 'they're in the Wild West'. In contrast, managers at the PES described employees who prefer strict frameworks and rules as not fitting in, and would do better to apply for jobs somewhere else (e.g. at the SIA):

I had a person, a really good young woman, she was educated in law, but was very 'within the framework' and wanted to be so careful about everything and that's not possible on our work, it doesn't work. You need to use these frameworks all the way out to the edges if you're going to participate in our 'Renewal Journey'. (manager, PES)

**Table 1** summarizes the different agency cultures emerging from the empirical data.

In the following, we will see how these differences in agency cultures are reflected in caseworkers' role identities.

### **Caseworker role identities in the PES and the SIA**

#### *The needs of the organization versus the needs of the client*

We see major differences in caseworker role identities at the two agencies, manifested also in the caseworkers' relation to organizational targets and performance.

Identifying as civil servants was evident among all the caseworkers we interviewed, yet very different caseworker role identities were found in the two agencies. The autonomy observed among PES

**Table 1. Agency cultures permeating the local offices**

	SIA	PES
<i>Dominant Culture</i>	<b>Formal</b> and hierarchical, shaped from above. <b>Loyalty</b> with management directions.	<b>Informal</b> , shaped from below. <b>Questioning</b> and <b>negotiating</b> management directions.
<i>Ideal of governance</i>	<b>Governance by manuals</b> (provided by the organization). Strict criteria for decision-making.	<b>Craftmanship</b> (based on an acquired tool-box). Loose criteria for decision-making.
Action orientation	<b>Internal:</b> focus on short-term organizational goals and output. <b>Formal and instrumental</b> approach. Focus on <b>rules</b> , regulation and organizational goals.	<b>External:</b> focus on long-term outcomes for clients and the local community. <b>Informal</b> and <b>pragmatic</b> approach. Focus on <b>clients</b> : clear and consistent purpose.
Control mechanisms	<b>Organizational control:</b> Transparency, efficiency, and production-related targets.	<b>Caseworker control:</b> Autonomy and discretion.

caseworkers illustrates the ideal of having freedom within frameworks, building their work on personal knowledge and experience developed in close contact with external actors, where the goal and rationality of their work is to achieve substantive outcomes for their twofold client: job-seekers and prospective employers. PES caseworkers often pointed out the SIA as an example of an agency they did *not* want the PES to be(come), i.e., as SIA front-line staff maintain a distant relationship to clients. They stressed how they themselves derived ‘energy’ and job motivation from personal contacts with job-seekers and employers, and the regular feedback these clients provided. The caseworkers’ ideal as regards a good job performance remained connected to their perceived purpose of guiding and helping external actors—work that required complex craftmanship and considerable autonomy at work.

In contrast, the SIA represents a more formalistic agency culture that promotes the value of ‘doing things the right way’. Caseworkers there focused on internal requirements by doing things as closely in line with organizational standards and objectives as possible. Such strong top-down agency norms and culture made it possible to keep a distant relationship to external actors’ needs and priorities as well as to their own personal feelings. A clear division between private and professional identity was put forward by SIA professionals, and personal involvement

was viewed as something that could be discussed at home at the kitchen table, but not as a caseworker in relation to clients:

We may think whatever we want about the set of rules we have, but I believe the clients are fairly happy that it’s not [name] who’s made this up or something like that, but that there is a set of rules. Having personal opinions, well that I can express at home at my kitchen table, but here I have a set of rules to follow. And I think this facilitates my work so that things don’t get so fuzzy (Trade union representative, SIA)

The distance to clients via their formalistic task description helps to achieve organizational goals. Even so, some negative aspects were expressed by SIA caseworkers—especially related to time management and experienced stress due to the performance indicators. A certain number of clients needed to be assessed each month; however, the level of stress could be reduced as long as one prioritizes ‘the right thing’. In fact, such performance indicators helped caseworkers to maintain their self-image of being productive employees, who were able to maintain an impersonal attitude towards clients that was beneficial to their own private life and well-being as well as to organizational performance.

In contrast, the PES caseworkers identified with their role also outside office hours, accentuating that the caseworkers are ‘the true PES’—not the Director General or politicians initiating managerial changes:

The next time I hear Mikael Sjöberg [DG], the way he talks and presents himself so self-righteously. He doesn’t represent the Public Employment Agency because I’m at least as much the Agency as he is. Well, if not even more. Did he ever get any person into employment? Do you understand? I meet employers. I wipe tears. (caseworker, PES)

Sometimes I want to call Ylva [the Swedish Minister of Employment at the time] and say ‘Come and work with me in DS [Direct Service], or Löfvén [Swedish Prime Minister] too, to experience what this is all about, the *handicraft* we’re doing, how people feel who come in here . . . it’s so easy to decide on things when you have a helicopter perspective, without experiencing the individual’s reaction or the impact decisions have on the individual, but I experience that. (caseworker, customer-service, PES)

Thus, the PES caseworkers expressed their personal involvement and identified strongly with their work and task, e.g., ‘I am the Public Employment Agency. I am the face of the entire agency’ (caseworker PES). This feeling of pride and meaningfulness in work encouraged resistance to managerial changes in work practices and priorities, as described above.

While the PES caseworkers seemed to view themselves as representatives of the needs and interests of job-seekers and employers, providing a service to the local community, the SIA caseworkers often viewed themselves as representatives of the state civil service, and as health insurance guardians for the Swedish welfare state. The SIA caseworkers expressed great pride in working with the ‘best social insurance in the world’. For them, it was important to make sure that people do not abuse the system. There was a shared ideal among managers and caseworkers to stand up for and maintain the activation orientation of the health insurance, of which the caseworkers must be the gatekeepers and guardians:

We have the world’s best sickness insurance. But we don’t protect it [. . .] far too many receive sickness benefits. [. . .] We live in one of the world’s richest countries, everyone has access to a fairly cheap healthcare, research is moving forward. At the same time, we have one of the world’s highest sickness absence rates. It doesn’t make sense. Maybe I’m too strict in my judgement, but somehow that’s not right. (caseworker, SIA)

You must not hesitate for this part of the job [to decline benefits at times], when a person is no longer entitled to sickness benefit, then the person shouldn’t have sickness benefits. The law is very clear there. (caseworker, SIA)

The SIA staff takes pride in smoothly adapting to politically set objectives. The caseworkers kept an eye on each other, exerting peer control especially in the formalized teamwork, and felt proud of themselves when ‘the right decision’ was taken. The caseworkers’ perceived task here was reduced to strictly implementing and taking organizationally sanctioned decisions regarding sickness benefits, which restricted their scope of action in the assessment process. Thus, the organizational logic of the SIA legitimized suppression of discretion in favour of a more productivity- and output-oriented discourse.

#### *An emergent versus instrumental approach to client interaction*

The complexity and role ambiguities characterizing the work, with contradictory demands on staff, tend to give rise to mixed feelings in street-level bureaucracies. The PES and SIA caseworkers had different approaches to, and tolerances for, complexity of tasks: the SIA staff tried to reduce complexity as much as possible, while PES staff instead embraced complexity as part of their expressed ideal as competent caseworkers.

The SIA staff reduced complexity primarily by stressing their insurance control function, checking clients’ benefit eligibility, thus restricting their sphere of involvement. Their investigations of clients’ work capacity were limited to reading medical certificates. During the period under study, the agency embraced a narrow conception of investigation, which did not

entail face-to-face meetings with clients or with the medical doctors writing the medical certificates. They mainly spoke with clients over the phone and only when direct contact was required (see also [Hollertz, Jacobsson and Seing 2018](#)). Fixed productivity measurements focusing on ‘the right entitlement at the right time’ defined the focus of their work and separated it from the individual clients. Because productivity goals were explicitly prioritized by management, coordination of the rehabilitation task (as required by law) was given low priority (see also [Hollertz, Jacobsson and Seing 2018](#); [Fransson and Quist 2018](#); [ISF 2018](#)). In contrast, in the preceding period (2011–14), ‘customer relations’ and coordination of rehabilitation had been a priority and caseworkers were then measured on the number of meetings with stakeholders they attended. Thus, when management objectives change, the priorities of the SIA caseworkers change too (see also [ISF 2018](#)).

Even when client contact was needed, caseworkers’ demanding workload led them to maintain their restrictive time management: ‘you need to know before encountering clients and other external actors what type of information you require’ (caseworker, SIA). The caseworkers with a commissioned client-focused work task, involving physical meetings, expressed that the time spent on personal meetings and relation-building interactions with clients had to be reduced, because physical meetings were too time-consuming. They displayed instrumentality in their use of meetings. Interactions with clients required knowing in advance what the objective was— an instrumental strategy:

It’s important to be structured [...] to know what the objective is, even when you have a meeting you need to know what the meaning of this meeting is and what you want from this meeting and at the same time chair the meeting. There are many factors that need to come together and you yourself need to know which ones. What do I need to know? What do I want to know and how will I find it out? (team-coordinator, SIA)

The goal of restricting interaction with clients was emphasized by SIA managers as a strategy to reduce

personal involvement and, by implication, to make it easier for caseworkers to make negative decisions— decline benefits—and strictly follow the rules (see also [Fransson and Quist 2018](#): 120f). At the time of the study, caseworkers’ assessment of benefit eligibility had to be based on ‘objective assessment findings’—i.e., visible signs of illness during physical examination by a doctor—and not solely describe his/her own view. According to the logic of the SIA, having personal contact and information on the client’s social situation entailed the risk of affecting caseworkers’ assessment. The distant relationship to clients was manifested, inter alia, in interviews where caseworkers expressed feelings of discomfort with clients who sought personal contact by being friendly or giving them a hug:

I’ve had a lot of young adults, who want to have a different relationship than you should have. And then you sit in a room [at a multi-stakeholder meeting], then you [the client] hug the occupational therapist and the doctor, and then I sit there and feel a bit silly. I’ve had hugs, me too, sometimes, but it feels weird, we shouldn’t be too close. Instead my role is to guard your [the client’s] right to sickness benefit [...] I should be kind and nice and I should listen, at the same time I’m not allowed to be friends with them. (caseworker, SIA)

The SIA caseworkers’ narrowed-down view of their mission and instrumental expectations regarding client interaction were in sharp contrast to PES caseworkers’ more pragmatic and informal understanding of their role and task. Instead of primarily *informing* the clients (as expressed at the SIA), the PES caseworkers emphasized the necessity of being a *good listener* and being open to what may *emerge* in the client encounter:

I think we need to have a local office where we meet with individuals. Not because I want to sit down with these people and talk or that I’m supposed to do that, but if I don’t start with that and don’t start with listening, if I don’t get the whole picture; ‘what does your economic situation look like, where do you live, how are you, what are your dreams and ideas?’ [...]

when you sit down with a human being you need to take in their facial expression, body language, you hear their worries, you see their eyes, you hear what they say, you can read between the lines, things that aren't stated in the doctor's certificate. . . (caseworker, PES)

The PES caseworkers expressed the need to assess clients more holistically and devise interventions in a way that required creativity and adaptability, according to the individual client's needs. Thus, autonomy and discretion were required. Moreover, the commitment of PES caseworkers often required emotional involvement:

If you're personally involved, you have a heart and, this is really important, you know what you can do and if you don't have the knowledge to do so, well then you investigate, it's really easy to look things up. (caseworker, PES)

Such emotional involvement—emphasizing flexibility, pragmatism, and practical-professional morals to help clients in the most appropriate ways—is in clear contrast to the standardized organizational morals expressed at the SIA. The PES caseworkers often stressed that it is more important to help clients in a constructive way than to strictly follow managerial rules and standards.

To conclude, the SIA caseworkers narrowed their responsibility to focusing on benefit determination, down-prioritizing client contact and coordination meetings, thus adjusting their work rather instrumentally in line with current management objectives, and displaying a highly formal rationality in their caseworker practice. At the PES, in contrast, casework involved discretion and perceived autonomy, the goal being to help, take in and act on clients' situation, displaying pragmatism in relation to current management principles; PES caseworker practice followed a substantive rationality, where substantive outcomes were more important than organizational output. While the PES caseworkers told about using experience-based gut feelings in their actions and decisions, the SIA caseworkers instead focused on internal requirements by following organizational standards closely. [Table 2](#) summarizes the differences in the role identities of caseworkers at the SIA and

PES, respectively—differences that, we argue, reflect the contrasting cultures of work in the two welfare state bureaucracies.

## DISCUSSION

Both the Swedish PES and the Swedish SIA have undergone rather drastic shifts in management styles and priorities during the past decade; however, we have seen that the caseworkers at these agencies respond very differently to such shifts. Much of the street-level bureaucracy literature has drawn conclusions on SLBs in general (e.g. [Lipsky 2010](#); [Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2000](#)). Our comparative study suggests the need for distinguishing between different kinds of SBLs, and in particular the formation of distinct work cultures and role identities, also among staff who do not qualify as professionals. The study shows that occupational groups that are heterogeneous in terms of educational background and training may still share a sense of mission and purpose that is perceived to be in contradiction to managerial control of work priorities.

The present study underlines the role of joint norms, largely shared by caseworkers and local managers alike, which affect the caseworker ideals embraced and practised, even though caseworkers at the two agencies lack disciplinary knowledge based on a common occupation or profession. Thus, the analysis suggests that the processes involved in shaping their approach are, in part, embedded in mechanisms within the workplace: the institutional context and informal structures within the agency (along with e.g. [Selznick 1957](#); [Sandfort 2000](#); [Riccucci 2005](#)), here conceptualized as agency culture. The analysis differentiated between the more instrumental and formalistic agency culture identified in local SIA offices (see also [Ståhl and Andersson 2018](#)), and the more informal and pragmatic culture displayed at local PES offices. The caseworker role identities that we have pointed to herein are institutionally reproduced identities, guiding caseworkers in their responses to management as well as their relation to clients.

The SIA agency culture was shaped from the top. This agency was characterized by tight organizational control achieved through manual-based governance

**Table 2. Caseworker role identities**

	SIA	PES
<i>Caseworker ideal</i>	Strong identity as <b>civil servant</b> , operating according to <b>formal rationality</b> (doing things the right way).	Strong identity as <b>practical professional</b> , operating according to <b>substantive rationality</b> (doing the right things in the best way).
	Important to be <b>adaptable</b> and <b>loyal</b> to shifting management directions.	<b>Loyal</b> to the <b>task</b> but <b>resistant</b> to shifting management directions.
	Shunning discretion	Embracing discretion
<i>Feelings of pride</i>	As civil servant, strictly <b>implementing democratic decisions</b> .	As practical professional, <b>servicing the local community</b> , satisfying job-seekers' and employers' needs.
	Pride in <b>delivering organizational targets</b> . <b>Organizational morals</b> : adaptation and loyalty to shifting objectives.	Pride in <b>achieving substantive results</b> . <b>Practical-professional morals</b> : taking the right decision—requiring pragmatic action.
<i>Client relationship</i>	Narrowly and formally defined responsibility.	Holistic responsibility and personal approach.
	Client interaction <b>without relationship-building</b> .	Client interaction <b>with relationship-building</b> .
<i>Emotional reward</i>	Minimizing client contact. Emotional rewards from managers and peers.	Emotional rewards from clients.

as well as a strong organizational and output-oriented discourse that shaped caseworkers' understanding of their work, as gatekeepers and protectors of the sickness insurance. Managers were present and visible in the daily work at the local offices, and management's perspective was indirectly reproduced through formalized teamwork with specialists and strong peer control among caseworkers (see also [Hollertz, Jacobsson and Seing 2018](#)). In this setting, we saw a caseworker role-identity with clear introverted goals developing; here *organizational loyalty and adaptability by delivering what management (currently) is asking for are what being a competent caseworker is about*. The SIA caseworkers tried to reduce the complexity of their task and largely shunned discretion; the clearer the specialists' instructions were, the better. Thus, standardization of client assessments and formality were cherished by both SIA management and staff. Thus, the moulding of their role identities as gatekeepers of sickness benefits, replacing caseworker judgement with attempts to find universal ways of deciding what is correct, needs to be seen as a consequence

of management principles and a top-down organizational culture intended to reduce complexity and scope of discretion, e.g., by un-qualifying the caseworkers' practice-based knowledge (cf. [Noordegraaf 2007](#)).

The PES agency culture was radically different. The analysis identified a more permissive setting, in which both managers and caseworkers saw individual autonomy and discretion as necessary for the work. PES caseworkers perceived a mismatch between values and norms coming from above and their own role identities, and they used irony and humour to demonstrate their distance and reflexivity in relation to current management directives and priorities (cf. [Paulsen 2018](#)). Thus, at the PES, we saw a cultivated culture of questioning directions from above. PES caseworkers embraced the complexity of their task, trying to satisfy both job-seekers' and employers' needs while meeting organizational goals. Handling this complexity was part of their competence as caseworkers. *Being competent here means being skilled in the 'craftmanship' of tailoring solutions to individual job-seekers in relation to the local labour market,*

which requires discretionary decision-making and pragmatism as well as external contacts. This type of caseworker work culture has similarities with the occupational work culture or professionalism, with strong identity and sense of purpose; however, it lacks a professional, institutional basis or occupational training. It is an experience- and practice-based competence, which highlights ‘the practicality of the wisdom’ used by staff in performing their everyday tasks (Bellini and Maestripieri 2018: 12). The PES caseworkers dealt with clients, analysed cases and took decisions on the basis of practice-based, acquired knowledge and skills, which presupposes a focus on substantive outcomes. Through their informal collegiality, they were able to share critique of standardized commitments, and through their close contact with clients and external actors, they developed personal skills and became skilled at using them (cf. Noordegraaf 2007) in the ‘puzzle-solving’ and ‘handicraft’ their work entails. For this practice-and experience-based work culture to develop, informal ‘schooling’ of senior colleagues seems to be key. In contrast to the SIA, seniority gives status at the PES. This finding is in line with Assadi and Lundin’s result, showing that, with increasing job tenure, Swedish PES staff tended to be less inclined to use formal assessment tools and less ready to act on new steering signals (2018: 166). Such a caseworker approach, with a high degree of perceived autonomy at work, is less likely to develop within an agency culture with stricter commitments met through top-down performance and output-focused governance.

The PES staff comes closest to the standard view of street-level bureaucrats: ‘as citizen agents who act in response to individual citizen clients in specific circumstances’, in Maynard-Moody and Musheno’s terms (2000: 348). These authors point out that street-level decisions are based on practical knowledge and informal procedures and are improvisational in the face of unpredictability, and that street-level workers tend to be proud of their ‘reality-tested pragmatism’, which is based on both first-hand experiences and handed-down wisdom from fellow street-level workers (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2000: 347, 354). As described, such approach characterized the PES caseworkers.

In contrast, SIA caseworkers come out as ‘state agents’, in Maynard-Moody and Musheno’s

conceptualization, rather than ‘citizen agents’. The SIA agency culture was characterized by hierarchy and formality, and indeed, the SIA caseworkers wanted to be good bureaucrats; however, their readiness to implement the 9.0 vision and de-prioritize coordination of rehabilitation—despite the fact that the law regulating their task had not been changed—suggests that organizational professionalism (Evetts 2011) may be a better way of conceptualizing their practice than is classical bureaucracy. The SIA caseworkers change their role-expectations when management priorities change even if formal regulations remained the same (see also ISF 2018).

Our findings are in line with previous observations that front-line workers seek congruence with existing organizational norms in their exercise of discretion (Lin 2000; Meyers and Lehmann Nielsen 2012). As Lin phrases it:

When policies are bent to purposes other than those that policy makers anticipated [...] it is not because staff do not understand their work. Instead, it is precisely because they try to make sense of their work, and thus to understand their jobs as a series of related tasks all bent toward the same purpose. This naturally leads them to refer each new policy to the values that are most salient in their organization. (Lin 2000: 162)

Besides well-known factors such as different formal missions and structural factors, such as task-complexity or case-loads, the present analysis thus underscores the role played by different agency cultures in shaping caseworker role identities, which manifests in different ideals concerning good work performance, views on and willingness to use discretion; relationship to clients, managers and external parties; as well as loyalty to current management goals.

Rather than seeing street-level bureaucrats primarily as individuals sharing structurally similar working conditions, the present analysis underscores what Selznick (1957) spoke of as the formation of ‘organizational character’ in bureaucracies—or to draw on Maynard-Moody and Musheno’s vocabulary (2000: 353), the formation of different organizational ‘castes’, which result from collective processes at the workplace in which institutional identities are shaped.

## CONCLUSION

Based on comparative ethnography, the present article has contributed an analysis of the role identities of caseworkers in two street-level bureaucracies, and the ways in which caseworker ideals and norms relate to management objectives in their practice as street-level bureaucrats.

The analysis suggests that agency culture mediates caseworker responses to top-management directives, affecting caseworkers' perceived autonomy and level of discretion in their everyday work as well as shaping what they perceive as 'good' work. The different agency cultures resulted in rather opposite caseworker role identities, affecting how front-line staff responded to organizational demands, either by focusing externally on client-related outcomes (the PES) or internally on organizational output (the SIA). Thus, while the SIA caseworkers represent a distinctive form of management-induced work culture, which made them rather introverted and highly adaptable to shifting internal organizational imperatives, the PES caseworkers, representing an experience- and practice-based work culture, were highly flexible and extroverted in their task orientation, but more resistant to shifting organizational goals.

The analysis suggests that shared work culture may mediate responses to managerialism also in the absence of strong occupational and professional communities. The analysis underscores the need for studying street-level bureaucrats in their context, focussing not just on the structural working conditions (cf. Lipsky 2010) or as consequences of new management techniques in the public sector (cf. Brodtkin 2011) but on the social settings in which new ways of managing the public sector are translated on an everyday basis. Such collective processes are one type of factor affecting how street-level bureaucrats respond to shifting management practices that deserves more attention in future research, as well as the conditions under which different agency cultures are formed.

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## ENDNOTES

1. At the SIA, the term specialist refers to local specialists on the social insurance as well as 'insurance medicine advisors' (physicians), and at the PES, it refers to rehabilitation specialists (psychologists, occupational therapists, or social workers).

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