

# The New Public Bureaucracy

## POLICY, ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

**Series Editors:** Giliberto Capano, *Professor of Political Science, Scuola Normale Superiore, Italy* and Edoardo Ongaro, *Professor of Public Management, The Open University, UK*

Change is the main explanatory challenge for the social sciences. Stability and persistence are simpler to understand and explain than change; at the same time, change is not separated from stability, and, from this point of view, any approach to change (in whatever field) should be able to account for both 'constancy and change'.

Change is of significance, both for explanatory reasons, and from a more normative/prescriptive standpoint. To address, lead, control and implement change is a key task for policy-makers who, to adjust to or improve reality, constantly strive to cope with reality through designed changes in the institutional structure, in the organizational and processual dimensions of public administration, and in the governance arrangements of policies.

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# The New Public Bureaucracy

The Expansion of Organisational Professionals  
in the Public Sector

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Karl Löfgren

*Professor of Public Administration, School of Government,  
Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand*

Patrik Hall

*Professor of Political Science, Department of Global Political  
Studies, Malmö University, Sweden*

POLICY, ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE



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# Preface and acknowledgement

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As early-career academics at the School of Technology and Society at Malmö University College, we witnessed a growing influx of young organisational professionals entering academia. These individuals brought with them expertise in project management, diversity management, human resources, and ‘innovation and commercialisation’. However, most arrived with only a generic understanding of organisations and little to no familiarity with the academic ecosystem. Instead, they carried with them corporate strategic thinking, business-oriented language, and – perhaps most notably – an allegiance to the organisation as an employer, rather than to any specific profession.

As our research in the public sector progressed, it became evident that this trend was not unique to academia. Similar patterns were emerging across public sector organisations more broadly. Moreover, we encountered consistent narratives across various policy sectors and national contexts. This shift was not about traditional bureaucratic inefficiencies or administrative red tape; rather, it reflected the rise of a new type of organisational professional – those whose primary focus was to ensure that ‘all the boxes were ticked’.

This book is not the final word on this phenomenon. On the contrary, we see it as the beginning of what we believe to be a promising new area of inquiry – one that will be of interest to students of public administration and offer a critical, nuanced lens through which practitioners can better understand the evolving challenges facing the public sector.

We owe a great debt to the many organisations, representatives, and individuals who supported this project. First and foremost, we thank the Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare (FORTE) for their generous financial support through grant 2019-01278, which made this work possible.

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We extend our sincere thanks to all those who contributed to data collection in Sweden and New Zealand. As we promised anonymity to all participants, we will not mention names or attribute specific comments. Nevertheless, our gratitude extends to those working with workforce data, past and present public sector managers, and the many professionals who generously shared their experiences during qualitative interviews. Your contributions were vital to the success of this project and the development of this book.

Finally, we would like to thank our project colleague, Linda Alamaa, for her contributions and intellectual input, and Ben Darrah-Morgan, a stranded Brit in New Zealand during the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic, who took on the role of research assistant without prior knowledge of the New Zealand public sector, yet managed to collect a substantial and invaluable body of data.

Wellington and Malmö, May 2025  
Karl Löfgren, Patrik Hall



# 1. The rise of a new public bureaucracy

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Is a new type of bureaucracy on the rise in the Western world? And if so, why? Many recent studies suggest that new types of occupational roles are expanding in public bureaucracies, sometimes referred to as the professionalisation of management (Torsteinsen, 2012); the development of organisational professionalism (Larson, 1977; Evetts, 2009); or a new corporate bureaucracy (Löfgren et al., 2022a). Often inspired by the organisation of the private sector, positions such as managers, PR and ICT experts, HR specialists, financial officers and accountants imply a gradual displacement of traditional ideals of professionals (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2008), perhaps most significantly described within universities (Whitchurch, 2006; Stage & Aagaard, 2019). This development seems to have taken place despite the negative connotations associated with ‘bureaucracy’ in the public debate since the 1980s.

In many ways this also reflects a paradox as most public sector reforms in recent decades have been motivated by anti-bureaucratic ambitions (Hood & Peters, 2004; Torsteinsen, 2012). There are several explanations to this seeming paradox, the most obvious one being that ‘cutting back on bureaucracy’ represents a form of managerial rhetoric rather than referring to real organisational practices. It is also highly unlikely to ‘do away with bureaucracy’ and implement post-bureaucratic visions since bureaucratic organisation fulfils important purposes such as order, stability, and accountability (Meier & Hill, 2007). In this book, we will not question the fact that bureaucracy is still alive and kicking, but rather investigate empirically how, and why, a *new type of bureaucracy* has emerged due to reforms aiming to reduce bureaucracy. Though there are many narratives and anecdotes regarding bureaucratic expansion, as well as empirical investigations of specific sectors, there is surprisingly little empirical evidence regarding Western public sectors.

The basic idea and arguments behind this book are simple but central. A range of management reforms and other political interventions have strived towards managerial autonomy and to fostering collaborative and trust-based cultures with the goal of shaping flexible, innovative, and agile public sector organisations. However, these endeavours have been accompanied by

renewed and obviously contradictory efforts towards monitoring, control, and accountability (Funck & Karlsson, 2023). These contradicting aspects of public management reforms have been addressed for decades, such as in the classical textbook on public sector reforms by Pollitt and Bouckaert emphasising the quest to *increase political control/free managers to manage and reduce administrative burden/sharpen accountability* (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017, ch. 7). In this book, we argue that the common denominator of these seemingly contradictory trends is *accountability*. Our basic argument is that a *new type of bureaucracy composed of organisational professionals expands as accountability becomes a core drive of modern public administrations*. The claim we make is that the combined forces of managerialism, politicisation, and professionalisation have led to new forms of (or consolidation of) control and monitoring efforts through delegated fiscal accountability, reporting requirements, quality and performance assurances, and other forms of monitoring mechanisms, in line with the general argument of modern society as a society of organisations (Perrow, 1991; Meyer & Bromley, 2013).

However, this is not just a top-down and externally enforced movement imposed on the affected organisations. Conforming to more accountabilities also creates new opportunities and incentives (and institutional logics) for individuals within the organisations. Following the distinctions between different levels of accountabilities (Michels & Meijer, 2008), institutional perceptions of accountability transpose to the organisational and individual levels. In line with more recent new institutional theory (Modell, 2009), public sector staff become embedded in the institutional logics of accountability mechanisms, which both enable and constrain the staff's interpretations of organisational realities, generating new occupational roles and meaning to their actions. Not only may these groups benefit from the emphasis on accountability, they often play active roles in establishing new tasks linked to accountability mechanisms, thereby not only perpetuating and enhancing accountability, but also *professionalising an organisationally focused bureaucracy*. So, while bureaucratisation primarily is the consequence of external pressures, organisations adapt and react to the perceived incentives created and, in particular, new role descriptions are created to manifest control through accountability mechanisms. Hence, one of our premises is that the more organisationally autonomous actors are, the more noticeable will control and monitoring become.

This book represents both a theorising and an empirical endeavour. Theoretically, we seek to go beyond the traditional critique of modern public administrations by demonstrating that the feature of bureaucratisation is more than budgets and administrative ratios, but also includes new professional groups making their way into administrative roles where the organisation is the main locus of activity. We are challenging the taxonomic New Public Management (NPM) narrative by focusing on the combined internal

and external forces that have contributed to this new form of bureaucratisation. Rather than emphasising one single factor ('managerialism'), we present how the public value of accountability has emerged as an omnipotent discourse across public sector organisations through various forces. The theorising ambition of the book will be further developed below, as well as in Chapter 2.

Empirically, this is a comparative study of the expansion of organisational professionals in the public sectors of two public sector systems which we normally do not compare: New Zealand and Sweden. Whilst comparative studies always have been considered a hallmark for understanding public sector change processes, very few studies dig deeper than an overall constitutional or rhetorical level (without even comparing simple descriptive workforce data). In addition to tracking overall tendencies, we will compare the development of the new bureaucracy on a sectoral level with two transport agencies, two police forces, and the higher educational sectors in the two countries.

The first step in our study is to locate the context of the broader global public administration debate around reforms, changes, and institutions, and to ascertain how we should study the growth of the new bureaucracy. Whilst managerial reforms have been highlighted as the dominant factor, less attention has been paid to the forces of politicisation. In the next section, we will present the existing narratives around these two concepts and commence with managerialism. Professionalisation as a driver will be further elaborated upon in Chapter 2.

## 1.2 MANAGERIAL REFORMS AS THE PRIME CHANGE MECHANISM

What has been common for a large part of academic literature on transformative changes (or even just modifications of existing practices) in public administration since the 1990s is an almost ritual reference to managerial reforms or NPM. Innovations, restructures, and reforms are all explained either as the outcome of managerialism, or as a response (or an alternative) to managerialism. This literature revolves around broad exploratory models seeking to capture the taxonomy in which public administration has passed different 'doctrines' or 'paradigms' with NPM being denominated as the (prime) historical rupture. Table 1.1 is an attempt to synthesise the many different voices and claims that have been made by various writers (Osborne, 2006; Bryson et al., 2014; Torfing et al., 2020).

An essential idea behind this simplified and heuristic picture is that we should be able to identify comparable movements around the globe (or at least between industrialised countries). Fairly early in the theorisation on NPM, there was a claim that we were witnessing a global convergence of the market

*Table 1.1 A taxonomy of public administration*

Characteristics	'Traditional public administration'	New Public Management	'Post-NPM'
Orientation	State	Market	Civil society
Emphasis	Rule of law, bureaucracy	Service outputs	Co-production, co-governance
Governance mechanisms	Hierarchy	Contracts, chains of accountability	Stewardship, interactivity, autonomy
Role of citizens	Voter/client	Consumers with a choice	Active co-producers and co-creators
Role of the corporate sector	External supplier	Role model and external contractor	Active co-producer, social investors
Value base	Integrity, professionalism, and equity	Efficiency and effectiveness	Efficiency and 'democratic values'

direction of NPM (Common, 1998); a claim which many (in particularly scholars from non-Anglophone jurisdictions) quickly questioned (Pollitt, 2011).

The logic of this taxonomy is clear although there are some disparities in terms of definitions and terminology. Whilst the denominators of public sector reforms (or more prosaically, 'changes') have received considerable attention from scholars around the world, the changes are rarely defined in systematic ways able to be gauged as most authors substitute definitions with rectifications, or descriptions of new statutory instruments (see e.g. Bryson et al., 2014). If we take the natural point of departure for the whole discussion – New Public Management – the literature applies a multitude of designations where the meaning is taken as given or assumed to be known by the reader. Among many classifications, NPM is presented as: 'system', 'movement', 'approach', 'trend', 'discourse', 'reforms', 'logic', 'ideology', 'doctrines', etc. (Greve, 2009, makes a valiant attempt to discern the different definitions). As the existing definitions refer to structural attributes, it perhaps comes as no surprise that there is a methodological bias in the research towards analysis of institutional dimensions of changes within a number of analytical and methodological strategies. We can, for instance, identify a rather extensive body of studies focussing on the 'language' of public management reforms. In particular, the discourse of NPM in the shape of metaphors, analogies, and narratives from the corporate world has been a popular strategy (cf. Salskov-Iversen, 1997; Poletti, 2004; Motion & Leitch, 2009). We also find attempts to identify changes in the institutional logics through systematic studies of rules and standards within

public sector organisations (cf. Bejerot & Hasselbladh, 2013). Indeed, one of the chief explanations to why certain jurisdictions have been more inclined to adopt managerialist reforms is that these reforms are ‘a product of the national historical context’ and a ‘cultural compatibility of the “reform wave”’ (Christensen & Lægreid, 2007, p. 5). The reforms are often aligned with the taxonomy, often with special focus shifts from vertical to horizontal chains of accountability, and studies of contractual arrangements in the public sector (Aucoin, 1990; Boston et al., 1996).

Proceeding to the post-NPM literature, the terminology falls in the category of empty signifiers in academic studies, and encompasses many different phenomena, normative aspirations, and general zeitgeist observations. However, one can overall observe two distinct readings of the extant literature (Reiter & Klenk, 2018). First, we find literature where post-NPM is used as a generic term for all those specific doctrines which, based on the strength of citizen engagement, co-production, and network collaboration, are alleged to enhance citizen influence and participation, and contribute to non-managerial public values (such as e.g. equity, democracy). This includes novel doctrines with imaginative names such as ‘New Public Governance’ (Osborne, 2006), ‘New Public Value’ (Stoker, 2006) and ‘Digital Era Governance’ (Dunleavy et al., 2006). Second, this literature also relates to a general parting from the NPM reforms of the 1990s with ‘joined up government’, and a stronger state regaining control over public service delivery (albeit not necessarily suspending market solutions) in those countries that had witnessed the most far-reaching reforms in the 1980s and 1990s (Christensen & Lægreid, 2007). In both cases, there is a normative undertone that the trajectory runs from something ‘bad’ to a state with more ‘positive’ connotations. And although many authorships seeking to balance out the claims of radical changes by applying terms such as ‘institutional legacies’, ‘path-dependency’, ‘revisions’, ‘co-existence’, and ‘hybrids’ between NPM and post-NPM, any description of post-NPM practices begins with a ritual ‘exorcist’ exercise in which the authorship seeks the expulsion of a supposed ‘evil spirit’ from public administration (cf. Osborne, 2006; Chapman & Duncan, 2007; Christensen & Lægreid, 2010).

Having asked questions about *what*, we need to ask the questions *where*, and *when*, can we observe reforms/changes? In the body of academic literature, we find examples of reform studies in everything from everyday practices within single public service providers (e.g. schools, hospitals), via jurisdictional legislation and reform packages, to global discursive changes (such as e.g. the OECD/PUMA narrative; cf. Sahlin-Andersson, 2001). In many respects this dilemma reflects a general question about studying change in public management. Where can we observe these changes in public management? At the risk of over-generalising, there seems to be something of a mismatch in analytical strategies between how we study the initial reforms of the past, and

the replacement. NPM reforms are normally studied through the lenses of a *macro/meta* perspective in which the reforms are described in terms of ideology, values, and major ruptures in history (such as changes in government offices). These studies are often not just pursuing public sector reforms, but also a grand narrative of changes in the international political and economic discourse (such as e.g. globalisation, fourth industrial revolution). The empirical unit of analysis is the language of the reform-makers as it is entrenched in the official policy. Conversely, there is a tendency that alternatives to these managerial changes further up the taxonomy ladder are associated through a *micro* perspective with single case studies of collaborative governance, co-production, and co-design (Voorberg et al., 2015).

Although our study cannot evade the extensive international literature on public management reforms, and to some extent aligns our approaches and empirical findings with it, the approach taken in this book diverges from this approach to public administration in a few ways. First, and probably most important, we find the taxonomy claim too formulaic. While we accredit the contention some value in communicating a pedagogic understanding of public management reforms to undergraduate students, it does not really capture the complexity, the incremental implementation, and not least the historical contingency of public administration beyond a heuristic level. The broad term *managerialism* (in contrast to NPM) has been a feature within most Western administrations since the foundation of the modern state but has only in certain parts of the world (such as the UK and New Zealand in the 1980s) been a calculated and ideological strategy for transforming the state. Rather than exclaiming the demise of managerialism and NPM, we should see the changes as a continuation (Lynn, 1998; Page, 2005). What is today considered as NPM is in fact business as usual, not an evil past, or a futuristic dystopia.

Today's public sector is built on NPM standards. We speak the NPM language [...], act like managers [...], and focus on measuring performance in different ways [...]. (Funck & Karlsson, 2020, p. 365)

Second, the taxonomic approach with its underlying normative meaning has not been particularly helpful as a lens for observing actual reforms and changes in public administration. By attributing certain values and roles to a predefined model, doctrine, or paradigm, the researcher is effectively constrained in her/his vantage point. This is particularly obvious in our empirical case with accountability on the organisational level as the core driver behind a growth in new cadres of bureaucrats in public sector organisations. Full commitment to the taxonomic approach means that you will only observe those parts of the workforce that are associated with certain types of accountabilities and leave out those professional groups that do not fit with the prescribed

attributes. As we will show below, some of the changes we are observing are actually the products of interventions to secure accountability, which predate what we normally understand as managerialism. Equally, advanced emancipatory practices and concepts such as innovation, public values, and collaborative governance have all been accompanied by various forms of performance measures and subsequently accountability mechanisms (Talbot, 2006; Kattel et al., 2013; Funck & Karlsson, 2023). Furthermore, the taxonomy suggests a shift in orientation from market to civil society by suggesting that current reforms are embracing values and patterns from civil society rather than the corporate world. This is at best wishful thinking, and completely ignores the fact that most modern trends in public administration have originated in the corporate world. As pointed out in an article about co-design, there is a historical trajectory from traditional marketing to modern corporate methods:

Generally, this current development [co-design] can be conceived as part of [what has been pointed] out to be the shift from thinking about people as customers in the 1970s, consumers in the 1980s, users, participants, adapters, and co-creators in the 2000s. (Antonini, 2021, p. 26)

In many respects, the literature (dominated by scholars from non-business disciplines) seems to be missing that the corporate world (or the ‘market’) has advanced and transformed itself since the 1980s. Modern businesses have embraced many of the soft and ‘benign’ values to keep up with an increasingly competitive world. Moreover, the taxonomic claim also neglects that some of the practices and conventions we today associate with the private sector (such as e.g. codes of conduct and strategic planning) have roots in organisational practices preceding profit-oriented organisations (Bromley & Meyer, 2017).

Consequently, while we maintain that accountability seems to be a constant factor over the decades with ever-growing importance, the rest of the taxonomy storyline has not been very beneficial. In addition, on a completely different level, one can probably question the underlying normative assumption that we have regressed from a neo-liberal state to something more communitarian and less sinister. However, this is something we will return to in our final discussion.

### 1.3 POLITICISATION

Although being conceived as a pivotal aspect of modern bureaucracies, *politicisation* has not attracted the same interest as managerialism. Still, it responds to similar calls for better political control of the administrative machinery of government, issues with the responsiveness of the public service, the implementation of government priorities, and the redistribution of power as a right

of the democratically elected leader (Halligan, 2020, p. 2). The two tendencies may immediately appear as diametrical but are probably united in practice. As pointed out by Aucoin (2012),

By empowering managers on the one hand and then asserting political control over them on the other, NPM reforms appeared contradictory [...]. This paradox is resolved by the theory that managers need greater management authority for management to secure desired outcomes that follow from more explicit policy and program direction from ministers, *who in turn hold them to account* for meeting their expectations. (Aucoin, 2012, p. 178, our emphasis; see also Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017, p. 166)

Unlike managerialism though, the politicisation literature exhibits a larger definitional palette of forms, and limited middle-range theories, often assigned to specific administrative traditions (Rouban, 2012). In many respects, the idea of politicisation is borne out of the democratic ideal of a constitutional demarcation line between the government of the day, and a permanent, neutral and non-partisan civil service, which also means that the normative challenge is contextual. As examples, both Wilsonian (1887/2007) and the Northcote/Trevelyan (1854) conventions present the argument for a clear separation.

The field of administration is a field of business. It is removed from the hurry and strife of politics .... Administration lies outside the proper sphere of politics. Administrative questions are not political questions. Although politics sets the tasks for administration, it should not be suffered to manipulate its offices. (Wilson, 1887/2007, p. 18)

However, while for example the traditional ‘Westminster narrative’ stipulates an independent and neutral civil service based on meritocratic principles, and with arm-lengths relationships to the political side (Rhodes et al., 2009), the politicised US spoils system is hardly considered to constitute a democratic problem in the US public (or among the political actors). Not to mention authoritarian states (e.g. China) where the differentiation between politics and administration is borderline and exists only on paper. Largely, the existing literature can be summarised as either focusing on the behaviour of civil servants (in particular their interaction with politicians), or the appointment of the very same (including the standards by which civil servants are recruited) (Cooper, 2018). Nevertheless, the field covers several different types of politicisations, such as ministerial intervention in the civil service, political advisors in ministerial offices, political patronage, and responsiveness among bureaucrats to political ‘signals’ (Hustedt & Salomonsen, 2014; Halligan, 2020; Svallfors, 2020). Alongside these identified types of politicisations, Aucoin (2012) identifies a few political developments in Westminster systems since the 1970s (ibid.,

pp. 181–183). They are probably valid for all industrial democracies as they are all related to the mounting interest in accountability.

- *Mass media.* The increased pressure from mass media on politicians has spilled over to the civil service media management, which in turn has become heavily politicised and employs a completely new cadre of media professionals.
- *Transparency and openness.* Various forms of ‘freedom of information’ and ‘open government’ initiatives have opened the floodgates for insights into government operations. In effect, this has forced the civil service to become more ‘politically savvy’ with respect to managing public information.
- *Auditing the performance of government.* Like media pressure, the number of audit exercises has made governments, and subsequently the civil service, more vulnerable to external scrutiny and critique.
- *Competition in the political marketplace.* Contrary to a previous system with political parties holding a monopoly on ‘politics’, there has been an explosion of new actors in public affairs (and/or revolving doors with resigning politicians changing sides) creating a crowded political space (see also Barley, 2010), accompanied by an anticipation that the civil service will promote the agenda of the government of the day (despite principles of neutrality).
- *Political volatility and polarisation.* Not only has the decline in trust in government and the political system resulted in an engaged citizenry, but it has also caused a more polarised political system promoting a binary mindset of either being a friend or a foe of the government.

In addition to these types of politicisations, *mainstreaming* policies for diversity, gender equality, sustainability, and human rights have made their way to both internal workplace policies as well as being adopted as general ‘dimensions’ in government policies for the public sector (for diversity, equality, and inclusion, see McCandless et al., 2022). Whilst the concept of mainstreaming is being widely used to signify some good practice with respect to upholding certain values, the concept has never transcended beyond the specific domains of e.g. gender, sustainability, and ethnicity within academic research. Notwithstanding the disparities between domains, mainstreaming can be understood (based on Nunan et al., 2012, regarding mainstreaming sustainability) as guidance to integrate or mainstream a specific dimension into all-encompassing policies, programmes, plans, and budgets. The approach reflects recognition that many decisions and activities have implications for the target dimension and that separate organisational entities (e.g. agencies) will not be

able to ensure that these dimensions are considered by all concerned participants. One can naturally discuss whether this is politicisation or not given the common adherence to some universal values, but it is probably fair to say that much of the mainstreaming initiatives within the public sector are outcomes of political demands. In addition, mainstreaming is certainly about accountability as this quote (on gender mainstreaming) shows:

... there is a need to make mainstreaming everyone's business and to ensure that policymakers are accountable for their activities. This requires attention to both the chain of accountability between officials and politicians, and the establishment of a culture of openness and participation. For there to be meaningful accountability there needs also to be effective monitoring, with targets being set, data being generated and analysed, and periodic reviews of policy being carried out. (Beveridge et al. 2000, pp. 390–391)

This combination of media and civic pressures, and quests for performance information (what Rosanvallon calls 'counter-democracy') all call for political actions and reactions in strengthening *accountability relationships* where politicians try – often unsuccessfully – to 'neutralise' or delegate these pressures to the public administration (Rosanvallon, 2008; Schillemans, 2022). During such circumstances, autonomy reforms rapidly lead to the reinforcement of new control mechanisms.

## 1.4 A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Over the years, the fields of public administration and management have witnessed an increasing interest for international comparative studies (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011). In contrast to comparative policy studies (Engeli & Rothmayr, 2014), studies of public administration have mainly concentrated on domestic components. The recent growing interest assumes that managerial reforms represent a global phenomenon with a convergence of public management around the globe (Hood & Peters, 2004). Equally, academic interest has been accompanied by a practitioner search for 'best practice' solutions. It is probably fair to assume that the academic interest is a result of the discipline(s) becoming more international in the footsteps of globalisation, transnational institutional practices (e.g. European integration or the establishment of transnational regulatory standards), and a mounting interdependence between different jurisdictions. Nevertheless, it is easy to be taken in by this seductive idea and ignore that reform and change programmes vary in terms of substance, trajectory, and speed in various jurisdictions (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). Consequently, much comparative work is more likely to reflect global isomorphic discourses rather than assess the outcome of national governments' attempts to reform (*ibid.*). Accordingly, it is probably not a surprise that out of the common subjects

discovered in a systematic literature review on comparative public administration, the three top subjects were (a) reform, (b) accountability/performance monitoring/evaluation and (c) New Public Management (Fitzpatrick et al., 2011, p. 824).

This book seeks to review the existing global body of empirical research in this field, but also to present new empirical research on bureaucratisation from two distinct jurisdictions: Sweden and New Zealand. The two countries share a few features such as both being constitutional monarchies, relatively small in terms of population (Sweden 10.5 million and New Zealand 5.2 million), both having transformed from predominantly suppliers of raw materials for export to service-based economies, and not least experiencing early and comprehensive welfare state reforms with the public sector becoming one of the chief employers in the country. While the political systems differ in many respects, there are also resemblances in terms of multiparty systems populated with parties from similar party families (Social Democratic, Liberal, Conservative, Green, Anti-establishment), and unicameral parliaments with governments most often relying on coalitions (or at least support and supply agreements) (Bale & Bergman, 2006). Finally, both countries share a history of rather radical and comprehensive public sector reforms in the 1980s and 1990s, basically transforming the sectors and privatising many public bodies. Albeit in different ways, the two countries have both been described as innovative exemplars in efforts to change the direction of the public sector.

There are equally some significant variations between the two countries.<sup>1</sup> First, Sweden is a country with a formal constitution while New Zealand is one of the few countries in the world still lacking a codified constitution. Although this lack of an entrenched constitutional source in New Zealand is compensated for by a patchwork of constitutional sources and conventions (such as the Cabinet Manual, the Treaty of Waitangi, the Bill of Rights, and large-scale adoption of international conventions on human rights, etc.), this is a substantial difference. Furthermore, the structures of the public sector differ between the two countries. Even though both countries have tended to centralise the public sector, and in some respect public services, the systems are very distinct. The Swedish system (Hall, 2015) is based on small ministerial departments, large independent state agencies, a health care system based on independent regional bodies, and not least strong and largely self-funded local governments responsible for the lion's share of welfare service delivery to the public (primary schools, day care and many welfare benefits). Meanwhile the

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<sup>1</sup> Although national responses to the Covid-19 pandemic were not part of our study, it is obvious that the two nations represented outliers in the democratic world regarding their respective responses to the challenges, which highlights the structural and political differences between the two countries.

New Zealand public sector is characterised by a highly centralised state with cabinet ministers at the top of the pyramids above centrally directed service delivery agencies (*Crown Entities*), weak regional councils<sup>2</sup> (responsible for roads and regional planning), and miniscule local councils in charge of waste collection and disposal, recycling, local planning, local roads, culture, and sports.

Furthermore, the managerial reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, which are part of our story, demonstrate some distinct trajectories and asymmetric lines of events. In New Zealand, the early reforms in the 1980s meant downsizing the public sector through privatisation and outsourcing, dismantling some of the welfare benefit mechanisms, and the introduction of managerial innovations such as performance contracting, purchaser–provider split, accrual accounting, and output-based monitoring. Meanwhile, some of the traditional pillars of the public service system, including primary and secondary education, social care, the police, and health care, remained pretty much untouched. Managerial reforms in Sweden occurred later in the 1990s but turned out to be more radical, with reforms encompassing all areas of the public sector. Most welfare services in education, social care, and large parts of the health care system were opened up for private operators to establish themselves as alternative service providers in a welfare service market with tax-funded ‘voucher’ systems. Although there are some signs of this in New Zealand as well (such as chartered schools), the magnitude of the reforms differs between the two countries. We should also mention that New Zealand’s history as an early pioneer and a comparative ‘exemplar’ of managerial reforms has more recently been questioned.

Even if it can be established beyond doubt that a country is or is not following the supposed trends of NPM, this hardly allows any conclusion to be drawn about the reality of the reforms, let alone comparing them with those taking place in another country or international organisation. The most obvious case of this kind of misunderstanding is illustrated by the fact that New Zealand has been for decades presented as the torchbearer of NPM, without taking into account its insularity in the middle of the Pacific, the respective size of the territory and the population, or the absence of an old and deep-rooted tradition of government in the country, which made it particularly difficult to compare with other countries. (Ziller, 2025, p. 893)

As we will demonstrate further on in this book, public sector reform attempts, managerialism, politicisation, and professionalisation have been talking points in the academic literature in both New Zealand and Sweden (see

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<sup>2</sup> During colonial times, the country was divided into six provinces led by an elected superintendent. Following most of them going into debt, all provincial governments were abolished in 1876.

Chapter 3). From a general comparative angle, most of the literature on NPM reforms includes some reflections on the differences between ‘Anglo-Saxon’ and ‘Scandinavian’ models of reforms (see Christensen & Lægreid, 2010). Equally, the standard and seminal work on public sector reforms by Pollitt and Bouckaert (2017) also operates with different types of ‘politico-administrative regimes’ in various parts of the world. While these works have been successful in promoting research interests beyond the domestic horizon, and to generate some heuristic vantage points, the majority have rarely gone beyond a descriptive and institutional analysis of the aspirations of central government reforms. In our view, what has been missing is digging deeper into the implementing actors of government within certain policy areas. Much of the comparative literature uses ‘the country’ as the chief unit of analysis. While this reduces complexity, it also develops sweeping generalisations. Our three empirical case areas will demonstrate that there are both poignant differences, but also similarities between the two countries. By adopting a mixed-method approach, and by identifying fully comparable cases (see below), we have conducted an all-round approach sensitive to the complexity and contextual contingency in the two countries.

## 1.5 THE ARGUMENT AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The ambition of this book is to investigate a specific empirical dimension of the changes in the public sector that have swept over the industrialised Western world in the past 40 years, with the explicit aim of contributing to theory in the field of public bureaucracy. With a point of departure in a specific outcome (a new type of bureaucratisation through organisational professionals), we identified accountability (as distinct relationships) as a common denominator across sectors and jurisdictions. The notion of accountability cannot be reduced to a simple narrative about managerial reforms but exhibits a much more nuanced account adding politicisation and professionalisation to the equation. The first part of this ambition is something we seek to identify and measure through the literature on organisational professionals and through studying public sector workforce data from both countries covering both the general tendency as well as the three distinct organisations and policy areas. The second part is investigated through the lens of accountability and an empirical mix of documentary sources and qualitative interviews. It is paramount to emphasise that the identification of accountability as the central concept emerged through some initial empirical work and was not a deductive conclusion from the onset.

The structure of the book is as follows. In Chapter 2, we will probe into the theoretical debate about the public sector workforce through the concepts of ‘bureaucracy’ and ‘bureaucratisation’. Based on the two different approaches

(bureaucracy as control and bureaucracy as the outcome of no control) we will demonstrate the dynamics of the concept and its alignment with accountability. We will also seek to align and calibrate this discussion with the influx of organisational professionals in the public sector as a form of bureaucratisation seeking to assure accountability. In Chapter 3, we will provide the historical background and context to the establishment of public sectors in the two countries as well as the establishment of public sector workforces. Although we do not present any evidence of correlation between the contextual factors and our results, this will provide the reader with some essential background to our empirical chapters. Most importantly, however, this chapter will provide the overall changes across sectors within the public sector workforces including the changes of organisational professionals in the two countries.

In Chapters 4–6, we will present our studies of the three organisations/policy areas: the higher education sector, transport agencies, and the police. This will include both our workforce data as well as how managerialism, politicisation, and professionalisation have affected accountability. We have in our comparative study selected two different organisations (the police and transport agencies), and one specific sector (higher education) as distinct cases for our study. While these three organisations/sectors have been affected by waves of managerial reforms, political interventions, and a drive to professionalise all levels of the organisations, they represent three unique policy fields each with their individual tenets, value systems, and, not least, contingent external relationships. These distinctive features are also echoed in the academic literature about them. While studies of the police since the 1960s have moulded into a discernible academic study in its own right, with journals, conferences, and clearly defined research questions (Reisig & Kane, 2014), transport policy is much more fragmented with disconnected ‘islands’ of research located in economics, psychology, geography, demography, environmental studies, public policy, engineering, and sociology. In this respect, studies of higher education represent an odd example in academia, as they are primarily introspective and conducted by the practitioners themselves, often with an explicit normative voice against ongoing reforms.

Finally, in Chapter 7, we will summarise and discuss our results in light of the current academic and public discussions on public sector organisations.

## 1.6 METHODS AND SOURCES

Our empirical data is a mix of quantitative and qualitative sources. With respect to our *quantitative* datasets, our ambition has been to juxtapose workforce data from the two different countries. This has been partly possible in terms of identifying the overall trends, but with some limitations. The first major limitation is the difference in existing datasets. Different official public bodies,

including Statistics Sweden, The Swedish Agency for Government Employers and The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, offer both sector-wide as well as individual workforce datasets from the Swedish public sector. In New Zealand, beyond individual public service departments – which are monitored by the Public Service Commission’s *Public Service Workforce Dataset* (PSWD) – there has until recently not existed a single data source for workforce statistics, meaning that researchers had to use either census data or to approach individual agencies directly to access occupational information. Also, modern HR systems beyond payroll systems have only recently started to be implemented. In comparison with individual organisational workforce statistics, general population statistics are highly centralised in New Zealand, with Statistics NZ directly controlling and disseminating access to large datasets, such as the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI) and Longitudinal Business Database (LBD).

The second obstacle, which also explains our choice of cases, is the fluctuation and effects of political winds in many parts of the public sector, with many smaller agencies being established, merged, folded in, and disestablished for various reasons. Here we selected the national police force and transport agencies as case studies. These organisations are comparatively large, and their core operations are highly visible at the national level. Their reach, and the significance of their core service delivery, implies complexity behind the scenes; unlike smaller, more bureaucratic departments, the ongoing nature of this regulatory and infrastructural work limits their susceptibility to short-term overhauls or project-based changes, so workforce developments are arguably more likely to highlight long-run structural or cultural trends. And most important, they are internationally comparable. Most of the data from the higher education sector in New Zealand was collected from individual institutions. Box 1.1 presents the different datasets.

## BOX 1.1 EMPIRICAL DATA SOURCES

### Sweden

- Statistics Sweden
- Swedish Agency for Government Employers (state employees, public sector)
- Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (regional and local employees, public sector)
- Annual reports from Swedish Police
- Workforce data from the Swedish Higher Education Authority

### New Zealand

- Public Service Commission's Public Service Workforce Datasets (PSWD)
- Census data from Statistics NZ
- Annual reports from NZ Police, New Zealand Transport Agency/Waka Kotahi, and individual higher education institutions
- Workforce data from individual educational institutions

In addition to the quantitative data, we adopted an informed respondent strategy through qualitative interviews with representatives involved in our case studies (Table 1.2). Our respondents from the two countries represented a broad range of interests within selected agencies and universities, as well as regulatory bodies, trade unions, and the strategic leadership of New Zealand's state sector (the Public Service Commission; between 1960 and 2022 the State Service Commission). Most respondents held managerial positions. All had extensive experience in dealing with qualifications, human resources, and professionalism issues, with many having worked directly within the agencies or with their regulation for several years. This experience was crucial, as we wanted their reflections to be grounded in organisational change.

The interviews were semi-structured, with respondents asked to describe their professional histories within the sector and reflect on aspects such as political steering, organisational development, significant changes, and, importantly, the professional composition of their organisations. Given that some topics, such as the expansion of managerial roles, could be viewed as controversial, we ensured that all responses were anonymised. The qualitative portion of the study received approval from New Zealand university ethics committees prior to conducting the interviews, whereas this was not considered necessary in Sweden. The interviews, conducted either in person or via video conferencing, lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded and fully transcribed. The goal was to capture reflections on our quantitative findings and explore respondents' views on continuity and change within the public sector workforce and professionalism.

*Table 1.2 Qualitative interviews in the organisational/sector studies*

Public sector organisation	Sweden	New Zealand
Transport agency	10	6
Police	8	6
Tertiary education	7	5

In addition to these interviews, we also interviewed a few senior executives who had been involved in some of the workforce changes over the years.

Finally, and for triangulation purposes, we used policy material such as annual reports, commission reports, legal documents, and similar documents to corroborate our findings. Once again, we experienced that this was easier to obtain in Sweden than in New Zealand as, over the years, the former country has institutionalised the drafting of commission reports as precursors to new legislation.

## 2. Theorising bureaucracy, accountability, and professionalism

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### 2.1 DEFINING BUREAUCRACY

In order to theorise the studied phenomenon, we need to start with the very concept of bureaucracy itself. Bureaucracy is probably close to the top of the charts of concepts used across social science disciplines, with Max Weber's ideal type of bureaucracy being the standard reference point. This is despite the fact, as pointed out by Höpfl (2006) and Cochrane (2018), that the modern general perception of Weber's 'theory' has moved on from Weber's original writing, and that the term has become a strawman for various normative and analytical organisational settings (du Gay, 2005; Styhre, 2007). According to Torsteinsen (2012) we need to accept that the term comes with both positive and negative connotations, which means that we often discuss bureaucracy at cross purposes. However, he still discerns three different definitions:

1. Bureaucracy is identical to the ideal type of bureaucracy defined and described by Max Weber.
2. Bureaucracy is an old-fashioned organisational form, established and developed in a specific period in human history, suited to the needs of that period. It is static and therefore not adaptable to contemporary challenges.
3. Bureaucracy is a contemporary organisational form with historical roots and discernible characteristics, but nevertheless is dynamic and adaptable to time, place, and circumstances. Max Weber's ideal-type bureaucracy is more an inspiration and a measuring rod than a straitjacket (Torsteinsen, 2012, p. 336).

The first definition is one we all know from the literature. The textbook model of this definition normally contains the following elements:

- Division of labour (specialisation)
- Clear hierarchies with different grades of authority
- Professionalism (the private life separated from the professional sphere)

- The impersonal nature of work
- Formal rules and procedures
- Merit-based recruitment and promotion systems
- Permanent organisation

Following Höpfl's reading of the original works by Weber (Weber, 1978), bureaucrats in Weber's original writing are the civil servants (*der Beamter*) with qualifications in law and 'administrative science' (*Kontorswissenschaft*). Their role as bureaucrat is only valid as a non-personalised employee of the office (*der Bureau*) (Höpfl, 2006, p. 12). Although this is what we normally refer to, similar perceptions of apolitical civil servants with clear and limited mandates, and a separation between the individual and the role can be located already in the British 1854 Northcote–Trevelyan Report (Greenaway, 2004), and in Woodrow Wilson's ideas about building a public administration in the US (Wilson, 1887/2007; see also Sager & Rosser, 2009 for comparisons between Weber and Wilson).

This perception excludes employments that are neither political nor legalistic and restricts the definition of the bureaucrat to professional back-office jobs within government units. Although not explicit, this reductionist perception of bureaucrats also omits professional groups within the public service (e.g. health professionals, police officers, teachers) as well as low-ranking technical and administrative support functions further down the pay scale.

While this definition originally was never meant to be anything but a theoretical ideal-type, or a heuristic benchmark, it has in recent public administration literature increasingly become rectified through the taxonomy literature on public sector 'governance', 'reforms', and 'paradigms' (cf. Osborne, 2006; Torfing et al., 2020) as described above. In short, the standard storyline of this literature is that the theoretical definition of bureaucracy becomes conflated with the physical and historical 'old public administration' which existed before managerial reforms in the 1980s and 1990s. Consequently, the original theoretical definition by Weber has been rejuvenated as an actual historical description.

The second, and pejorative, definition is the one most associated with bureaucracy in everyday conversations. In this sense, bureaucracy becomes a synonym for inefficient and unresponsive administration, legal and hierarchical rigidity in decision-making processes, lack of organisational responsibility and accountability, and the absence of market incentives. These critiques align with the arguments for reforms discussed in Chapter 1 (Hood, 1991; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). In fact, this criticism of bureaucracy was one of the foundational elements of economic liberal thinking as early as the eighteenth century, with Jean-Claude Marie Vincent de Gournay (1712–1759), who

is credited with coining the term *bureaucratie*, literally meaning ‘government by desks’ (Joukovskaia, 2023). De Gournay criticised state regulations within the mercantilist French state – a critique later expanded upon by classical liberals such as Adam Smith, though Smith’s focus was primarily on government interference in the economy. The general narrative surrounding this definition suggests that the outdated bureaucracy, broadly encompassing the public sector workforce, is seen as an obstacle to transforming the public sector into a more transparent, efficient, and flexible system, often through the adoption of private sector practices.

The final definition has sought to acknowledge bureaucracy in a less normative manner and instead accepts it as a dynamic organisational form. For instance, Kocka (1981) argues that elements of bureaucracy were present in the organisation of large-scale German industries, such as Siemens, as early as the late nineteenth century. Even if the goals of private business were distinctly different from public administration, the challenges of *large-scale organisation* were not. In Reinhard Bendix’s (1956) work on industrial bureaucracy, bureaucracy was treated as an unavoidable empirical phenomenon rather than an ideal type or a pejorative, where growing size and span of control problems by default led to specialisation and delegation. This, in turn, made the professionalisation of administration necessary. With increasing size, the size of the administration (what Bendix called the administration/production ratio) also tended to grow.

Administrative efficiency is said to require specialisation. But it also requires a unity of command often incompatible with specialisation. Efficiency makes it mandatory that each superior has a limited number of subordinates (span of control) in keeping with the ability to supervise them. This principle, however, implies that new levels of organisation must be set up whenever the number of subordinates has increased beyond their superiors’ ability to control them effectively. Hence, the principle conflicts with one that is equally valid: before being acted upon, matters should pass through as few levels of organisation as possible. [...] These problems of large-scale organisations have been brought to the fore with the increasing size and complexity of modern industry. [...] In this endeavour managers have typically resorted to ideological appeals, not as a substitute for material incentives and organisational improvements, but as a means by which to increase, if possible, the cooperation of employees, given the organisational environment in which they work. (Bendix, 1956, p. 248)

Thus, the problems of large-scale organisations – the unavoidable process of bureaucratisation – cannot be solved, only ‘managed’. The ‘ideological appeals’ which Bendix refers to may thus be seen as nothing less than management ideals, such as (at the time of his writing) the human relations school.

However, many of these management ideals became anti-bureaucratic already in the 1960s (Crozier, 1964), perhaps paradoxically, since they

emerged from bureaucratic organisations. Where the negative definitions dominated much of the public administration discourse between the 1960s and 1990s, the positive sides of bureaucracy have witnessed something of a renaissance since the beginning of the new millennium (du Gay, 2005; Olsen, 2006). Bureaucracy safeguards political neutrality in administrative decision-making, ensures equality of services, and guarantees predictability for both civil servants and the constituents of the jurisdiction (Peters, 2001). In addition, the scope of bureaucracy has also widened following the critically acclaimed works of Lipsky on ‘street-level bureaucrats’ where front-line workers also become decision-makers (Lipsky, 1979). This conceptual expansion of the term conveys a less normatively derogatory definition of ‘the bureaucrat’ and comprises a broader group of front-line workers outside ‘the bureau’. Furthermore, the idea of a post-bureaucratic state (whether managerialist or based on civil society principles) has been criticised for being fanciful and inaccurate, with the locus of bureaucracy being moved rather than the bureaucracy being whisked away by market mechanisms (Farrell & Morris, 2003). And as pointed out by Janet Newman,

However, few ‘pure’ bureaucracies have ever existed in public services: most organisations combine features of bureaucracy and professionalism, of bureaucracy and managerialism, or even bureaucracy and entrepreneurship. (Newman, 2005, p. 191)

In that respect, it is pivotal to conceive bureaucracy as a flexible *institution* able to comprise authority, competition, and cooperation rather than just representing a hegemonic standpoint (Thompson & Alvesson, 2005). We will in our study adhere to this final definition of bureaucracy, and rather than advocating an alternative to bureaucracy, we will critically discuss *the changes within* a public sector bureaucracy where principles of neutrality, specialisation, division of labour, predictability, and professionalism are central to operations, but where flexibility and dynamics are equally important. However, it is important to acknowledge that the *growth* of bureaucracy is not a neutral phenomenon. We need to distinguish the existence of bureaucratic organisations from their expansion.

## 2.2 BUREAUCRATISATION AS A DYNAMIC PROCESS

While bureaucracy refers to *organisational principles*, bureaucratisation refers to a *process* in which these principles create a new form of order in an organisational setting. Although Weber himself did not notice any potential conflicts between bureaucratisation and other processes (such as professionalisation, see Ritzer, 1975), the process of bureaucratisation is normally understood in the literature as pathological extensions of the neutral Weberian bureaucracy

(Thompson, 1961), or as ‘good rules gone bad’ (Bozeman, 1993). The pathology lies in the observation that the ‘red tape’ of bureaucratisation serves no ‘appreciable social or organisational function but nonetheless remains in force and results in inefficiency, unnecessary delays, frustration and vexation’ (Bozeman & Scott, 1996, p. 8). However, the causes behind bureaucratisation differ, with one side pointing to either too much control or the absence of control.

### **2.2.1 Bureaucratisation Caused by the Absence of Political Control**

History demonstrates a recurrent idea assuming that there is a demand to keep bureaucracy on a tight leash through democratic, economic, and administrative control mechanisms. Already the Song dynasty in ancient China witnessed reforms in the eleventh century aiming to establish administrative efficiency and control. The probably most prevalent idea about bureaucratisation in modern times has been about bureaucracies’ inherent power to expand based on the asymmetric relationship between (political) principals and (administrative) agents (Niskanen, 1971). This theory of bureaucratisation maintains a fundamental difference between private and public sector bureaucracies. While for-profit organisations have incentives to minimise their administrative costs to raise their profits, public organisations lack such incentives since they are financed by others’ (taxpayers’) money. Instead, there is an almost perverse incentive to grow (‘budget maximisation’) since expansion and organisational size signal political centrality and salience. Furthermore, the information relationship between the political level and the bureaucracy is asymmetric with the latter holding the upper hand. Finally, the absence of market mechanisms (such as the prize mechanism) in public sector services makes it difficult to identify the optimal (service) production point. The remedy to this perverse behaviour is to introduce market incentives in public bureaucracies. Among the prescriptions, we find the introduction of competition (either through full-scale privatisation of public services or by introducing quasi-markets), establishing performance indicators making organisational units accountable for their own costs, and various individual incentives such as performance-based salaries (which probably represent the most distinct departure from the Weberian model). These theoretical ideas have obviously been of great importance for many of the market-based administrative reforms in recent decades but have also faced massive criticism for the lack of empirical evidence to substantiate the theoretical claims (Blais & Dion, 1990). In a more nuanced version, the public choice criticism of bureaucratisation has been refined through the ‘bureau-shaping theory’ (Dunleavy, 1991) which rejects budget maximisation but still maintains the self-serving nature of bureaucratic activity (through securing better work conditions and enhancing status). It should

be noted that this theoretical approach has also been criticised for a dearth of empirical evidence (Marsh et al., 2000). Normative critique has also been launched regarding the risks of self-fulfilling prophecies when reformers with these perspectives implement pay-for-performance schemes and other utility-based incentive schemes within civil services (Peters, 2001, p. 14; see also Newman, 2001).

Although claims about utility-seeking individuals using bureaucratisation as leverage for their own benefit have been criticised for lack of empirical evidence, we do not exclude that this claim can be useful as *a hypothesis* (Hay, 2004). For instance, and something we will return to in the empirical chapters of this volume, the increasing number of university graduates in Western liberal democracies has led to a quest for intellectually challenging jobs which may (unconsciously) contribute to an increasing bureaucratisation of the public sector.

From a different ideological angle, the Left has nourished anti-bureaucratic sentiments ever since the rise of early utopian socialists in the nineteenth century, not least because bureaucracy was perceived as ideologically conservative. However, during the post-Second World War period, Western Social Democrats were increasingly identified with a growing welfare bureaucracy. In Sweden, for instance, the Social Democrats identified the risks of a growing ‘technocracy’ and the disconnect between the public sector and the citizens (Mellbourn, 1986), as demonstrated in this quote from one of the leading Social Democratic civil service reformers in Sweden during the late 1980s:

Our objective was to achieve an effective democracy! It was a sincere conviction striving to make it work better. The parliament and the government are mandated by the people, and this must permeate the public administration. (Interview with the investigator behind the Swedish Transport Agency)

Consequently, both efficiency and democracy can be employed as arguments to advocate that bureaucracy needs to be kept on a short leash. There seems to be a widespread argument among both economists and in various political circles that bureaucracy tends to expand immensely *in the absence of control* (with some variation between different forms of control). However, one can just as well argue for an inverse relationship: bureaucratisation *caused by a desire to control*.

## 2.2.2 Bureaucratisation Because of Increasing (Political) Control

The Iron Law of Liberalism states that any market reform, any government initiative intended to reduce red tape and promote market forces will have the ultimate effect of increasing the total number of regulations, the total amount of paperwork, and the total number of bureaucrats the government employs. (Graeber, 2015, p. 9)

One does not need to agree with Graeber's (sarcastic) statement to recognise that both market-inspired reforms and political reforms – whether introduced to counter bureaucratic growth or not – can lead to bureaucratisation. There is an extensive body of literature highlighting the bureaucratising effects of public management reforms, or attempts to increase political control (e.g. Baldwin, 1990; Hood & Peters, 2004; Hood & Dixon, 2016; Hyndman & Lapsley, 2016). Leaving aside the managerial discourse, there is a natural tendency to observe that expanding political ambitions are often mirrored by an expanding bureaucracy (Etzioni-Halevy, 1985). For instance, as mentioned above, the growth of professionals and 'street-level bureaucrats', who are themselves controlled by national or sub-national authorities, has inevitably led to an increase in public bureaucracy in many welfare states.

To say that the scope of government has increased because there are more things being done in the public sector is tautological, but it is important to note the substantial array of goods and services now produced by collective action that either were unheard of, or were the subjects of private action, several decades earlier. (Peters, 2001, p. 16)

However, this 'inevitable' advancement also fosters a dynamic of public sector growth, where politicians' ability to control the expanding bureaucracy becomes increasingly cumbersome. Specifically, this expansion creates accountability problems, as politicians expect bureaucracies to be accountable to popular demands, while individual bureaucracies seek to distance themselves from these demands (Peters, 2001, p. 225). From a more philosophical perspective, Rosanvallon (2008) links widening political ambitions to the growth of modern democratic governance. Demands for increased transparency from politicians, the public, the media (including social media), and organised interests continually raise expectations of what democratic governments should achieve. The default response to these heightened expectations is often to generate new bureaucratic functions and behaviours. Among these, Rosanvallon argues, there is a particular emphasis on new forms of accountability mechanisms. Thus, the demand for greater accountability may be raised both by those advocating for more democratic government and by those calling for stronger managerial and market-inspired controls.

### 2.3 THE ACCOUNTABLE BUREAUCRACY

Accountability is an elusive social science concept. While often being announced as a central public value in public service (Kernaghan, 2003), the concept remains a 'garbage can filled with good intentions, loosely defined concepts, and vague images of good governance' (Bovens, 2007, p. 184) most

often ‘used in close association with other ideas, particularly responsiveness, answerability, fault, and blame’ (Gregory, 2003, p. 681). Even though the concept has primarily gained currency in recent decades, the idea of holding public administration accountable (and equally reverse efforts to shield bureaucratic organisation from external scrutiny), is far from new. Max Weber pointed out already in *Economy and Society* that bureaucracies seek to protect their own structures and identities against the outside, and particularly their political masters (Weber, 1978, pp. 991–992, here cited in Olsen, 2008). However, departing from a ‘traditional’ financial accounting meaning, the term has, since the 1990s, become synonymous with all kinds of evaluative arrangements through which the performance of actors, the quality of institutions and processes, and not least satisfaction among constituents can be recorded, evaluated, presented, and justified. In fact, some scholars have proclaimed accountability to be a defining feature of modern societies in the shape of the ‘audit society’ (Power, 1997) or the ‘evaluation society’ (Dahler-Larsen, 2011). For the purposes of this book, we will follow Bovens (2007) and his understanding and definition of accountability as a specific social relationship (in contrast to a normative ideal, see Bovens, 2010).

In Bovens’s words: ‘accountability is a relationship between an actor and a forum, in which the actor has an obligation to explain and to justify his or her conduct, the forum can pose questions and pass judgement, and the actor may face consequences’ (Bovens, 2007, p. 450). Both the actor and the forum can be individuals, but they are more likely to appear as collective actors (such as organisations). The relationship between them is often characterised as a vertical principal–agent relation with the principal being someone with a political mandate (such as a minister, a politician, an auditor, etc.), but may also appear more horizontally as relationships between e.g. a specific agency and its stakeholders, individual workforce members, professional associations, and media organisations. Some of the relationships are enacted through formal constitutional and legal conventions containing prescribed instruments of sanctions (such as dismissals and lawsuits), while others rest on informal institutional instruments such as codes of conduct, reputational standards, and official reviews where the sanctions for non-compliance are more subtle and often only exist in the shape of the *prospect* of sanctions (or to use Bovens’s own terminology, the possibility of *facing consequences*). Equally important is that ‘public’, as in public accountability, means that public sector organisations are open and transparent to a broader public (Bovens et al., 2014). Whereas some of the arrangements for explaining and justifying refer to external actors, it is worth remembering that these arrangements are also important for securing accountability *internally* within the organisation. In fact, in many cases the external demands for accountability arrangements have been driving the establishment of corresponding internal practices. Finally, accountability, and

holding the bureaucracy accountable, is one of the core pillars of any democratic system (Peters, 2014).

Alongside this broad understanding of accountability, the new public bureaucracy is involved in different forms of accountability relations. In most cases, the internal relationships of accountability feed into external reporting loops. What is notable in relation to the existing body of literature is that the cohorts of the new public bureaucracy we are describing in this book go beyond the traditional professional groups of 'auditees' (such as accountants and legal advisers). The function of being part of the accountability relationships in public sector organisations is much more complex as the 'consequences' refer to more than just the legal and political sides of the concept, and there we can nowadays add scrutinising international organisations to the category of accountability fora (Koppell, 2010).

Even though the role descriptions of the workforce in the new public bureaucracy in most cases do not mention accountability as part of their professional role description, the *appearance and visibility of accountability mechanisms* have become a dominating feature in public administration over the past 40 years (Höpfl, 2011). Different waves of reform movements, whether managerialist or not, have highlighted the importance of accountability. While not necessarily changing existing notions of accountability, the reforms have calibrated not only the allocation of responsibility but also expanded the types of accountability relationships as the concept is multidimensional (Gregory, 2009). Table 2.1 below provides us (based on Bovens, 2007) with a broad understanding of five different relationships, the characteristics, the agency response function, and examples of specific roles.

The first relationship, the *political*, is by no means a novelty; rather, it is a feature of all democratic systems where public sector organisations are politically accountable (Mulgan, 2003). With the notable exception of the UK system, this accountability is, for the most part, exercised indirectly through a hierarchy of levels, with elected politicians at the top and appointed managers beneath them. The political relationship also extends to everyday interaction with broader public opinion, through mass media and, more recently, social media. Within this framework, we find a wide range of professional competencies, including policy analysts, risk analysts, legal experts, and, not least, communication officers.

Like the political relationship, *legal* accountability is not new but has existed since the birth of the modern state and the institutionalisation of legality as a core principle of public administration. However, the significance of both political and legal accountability has intensified due to factors such as decentralisation, devolution, and agencification (Maggetti & Verhoest, 2014). The disintegration and fragmentation of the 'state' have raised issues regarding authority, competencies, autonomy, and, not least, accountability between

Table 2.1 *New public bureaucracy and accountability*

Accountability relationship	Characteristics	Agency response	Examples of professional roles
<i>Political</i>	Vertical, political, constitutional	Managerial, communication, policy advice, legal advice	Managers, communication officers, legal advisors, policy analysts, risk managers
<i>Legal</i>	Vertical, legal	Legal advice	Legal advisors
<i>Administrative</i>	Vertical/horizontal, political	Quality and performance assurance, information systems, standards, financial management, communication	Accountants, evaluators, communication officers, policy analysts, IT staff, financial controllers
<i>Professional</i>	Horizontal, self-regulated	Accreditation, standards, communication, human resources	Human resources, accreditation officers, diversity officers
<i>Social</i>	Horizontal, reputational, branding	Stakeholder/user engagement, marketing, branding	Communication officers, event managers, marketing staff

the ‘core’ government and the various entities and layers within the broader public sector. For example, formally autonomous agencies are often used as ‘scapegoats’, being held accountable for actions taken by responsible ministers (Hood, 2011; Löfgren et al., 2018). At the same time, rights-based demands have proliferated, even in public sectors (such as the Swedish one) where individual rights have historically been relatively weak. Public health organisations are becoming accountable to patients’ rights, schools to children’s rights, etc., as politicians introduce new catalogues of individual rights into national regulations (cf. Lindgren et al., 2021).

The third type of accountability, *administrative*, has relocated from the original basic form of financial accountancy to a multitude of indicators, measures, and systems for maintaining control and reporting regarding all types of performance. Most democratic systems have experienced an intensification of their public authorities and organisations controlling and evaluating what they do (Lewis, 2015). This includes both internal efficiency in terms of work processes, quality, financial management, production outputs, and managerial capabilities, as well as external user and customer satisfaction. This relationship is probably the best-covered aspect of accountability ‘regimes’ in the literature (Moynihan, 2009; Triantafillou, 2017). The growing emphasis on administrative accountability has also been carried by the evolution of information and communication technologies (ICTs), and the new improved methods of collecting, storing, analysing, and visualising data – usually labelled ‘big data’ (Löfgren & Webster, 2020). Furthermore, the expansion of administrative accountability has an important global dimension, not just through intergovernmental cooperation such as the EU and ISO, but also through general as well as private or semi-private specialised standardising organisations to which even government bodies are accountable (Brunsson & Jacobsson, 2000; Gustafsson, 2020). Many of these organisations – such as the European Public Sector Accounting Standards, The International Federation of Accountants, and The Institute for Internal Auditors – perceive the creation of administrative accountability standards as their *raison d’être*.

The fourth relationship of accountability refers to the *professionalism* of the different groups within the workforce of the organisation. Whilst initially being a relationship between individual professionals and a professional association and/or a code, this has become a significant component in maintaining the professional standards and reputation of public sector organisations. Consequently, this has particularly affected the HR divisions of many public sector organisations with respect to recruitment, but also in terms of identifying gaps in capabilities and skills. The growing interest in expanding the professional status for new groups within the public sector workforce has fuelled this development (Abbott, 1988; Hodgson, 2002). Furthermore, the growing significance of *diversity*, *equity*, and *inclusion management* to recruit and

retain staff with different backgrounds and abilities (e.g. ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disabilities) has not only created government regulation to adhere to, but also prescribed internal accountability standards for both management and HR (Olsen & Martins, 2012).

The final accountability relationship – *social* – refers to how public sector organisations have recently been required to enhance their reputation and ‘brand’ both with specific policy communities (such as producer interests and trade associations) and the broader public/community. Continuously managing a public image is seen as a central element in bolstering an organisation’s reputation, as well as deflecting external criticism (Carpenter & Krause, 2012; Busuioac & Lodge, 2016). Social accountability strategies apply to all types of organisations, as they must engage in some level of self-defence and uncertainty management to function effectively as collectives. However, more explicit forms of accountability to the outside world have emerged in recent decades. The dynamics of reputation building have evolved from the traditional role of press secretaries to more complex ecosystems involving a multitude of actors (Blomgren et al., 2014; Waeraas & Maor, 2015).

There are natural overlaps between the different relationships and roles described here. For example, scandals in which a specific public agency is held accountable for its actions often impact all these relationships. Similarly, modern public organisations’ investments in sustainability often span political, administrative, legal, professional, and social relationships. Furthermore, while we maintain that accountability, as an institutionalised relationship, is a core function for certain groups, we acknowledge that this is not the only role in which these workforce members are involved. Professional communities, for instance, are judged individually for their specific operations as professionals. By emphasising accountability rather than responsibility, we do not highlight single standard actions or operations (such as teaching a school class or performing surgery) but rather the general abilities and performance at the organisational level (Brunsson et al., 2022).

In Chapter 1, we suggested that the new bureaucracy may be set in motion by autonomy reforms and subsequent quests for political control. We propose that accountability is central to this dynamic. Decentralisation and/or delegation (Bevir, 2022) strengthen managerial ambitions for accountability as an organisational actor, primarily reinforcing the legal, administrative, and professional aspects of accountability relations. In contrast, political ambitions for renewed control suggest a more system-oriented conception of accountability. Specifically, as Schillemans (2022) argues, the introduction of new forms of accountability appears to serve two central political objectives: on the one hand, demonstrating that you take issues seriously and, on the other, attempting to ‘neutralise’ the issue at hand by shaping accountable actors.

One good example, illustrated in much of the literature, is reforms in higher education worldwide (cf. Whitchurch, 2006; Schneijderberg & Steinhardt, 2018). The pursuit of innovation and economic growth in the globalised economy, as well as the rapidly rising costs of both higher education and research, has since the 1980s drawn political attention to the role and performance of higher education institutions as *organisations*. This global trend seems to follow a similar pattern with the establishment of national and international standards for research and teaching (*rankings*), the creation of standardised mechanisms to monitor and evaluate these standards (*accreditation*), and finally the foundation of units within (and outside) higher education organisations to administer and manage these external demands for accountability (*qualification authorities*). Similar patterns can be identified in other public sector organisations where external demands for accountability generate new professional functions and roles. It is in this context that we are putting forward our argument about the emergence of organisational professionals as representatives of a new type of bureaucratisation.

## 2.4 BUREAUCRATISATION AND ORGANISATIONAL PROFESSIONALISM

Apart from being viewed as pathological influences in public sector organisations that cause inefficiencies and rigidity, bureaucratisation has also been identified as a prime opponent of professionalism. Since the 1980s, work sociologists have paid particular attention to the changing patterns of professionalism within public sector organisations (parallel to the discussions above). The 'classical' ideal of professionalisation in these organisations has been challenged by an increasing emphasis on efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability in public sector service delivery (cf. Stronach et al., 2002; Gleeson & Knights, 2006; Evetts, 2009; Ward, 2011). New managerial chains of accountability have redirected loyalty and commitment away from professional protocols to modern forms of accountability. These new forms manifest through hierarchical chains of command, based on the assumption that established professional groups behave as self-serving as any other groups in society and cannot be trusted to exercise discretion (Barberis, 1998; Moynihan, 2008). This evolution has led to well-documented conflicts between the managerial and professional sides of public organisations (Reay & Hinings, 2009). Rather than honouring the traditional internal values of professional communities (such as those among nurses, doctors, teachers, and police officers), loyalty has shifted to the individual organisation, its public image, external visibility, and, not least, its performance and appearance. While earlier systems of accountability were based on interpersonal relationships, formal qualifications and merit, and the profession's internal norms and values, the new managerial regime is

based on values related to 'objective' and 'neutral' criteria for organisational success, often implemented through self-appraising techniques (Moynihan, 2009). Likewise, the shift from a client/citizen role to a customer role (like the private sector) has generated a demand for service satisfaction functions within public sector organisations. This includes traditional customer relationship management, as well as reputation management, branding, and public relations (Carpenter, 2010; Christensen & Lodge, 2018).

Against the backdrop of these descriptions, Larson (1977), followed by Evetts (2009), distinguishes between organisational professionalism and occupational professionalism. The former manifests through a discourse of control, leans toward the managerial side of the organisation, and incorporates rational-legal forms of authority. The latter emerges from the discourse of professional occupational groups and collegial authority, with trust from both employers and constituents (such as clients, patients, etc.). As emphasised by Evetts, these are ideal types intended to discuss changes in public management, whereas 'reality' presents a much more complex understanding of the concepts. Noordegraaf (2011) affirms this distinction by referring to organisational professionals as those '*responsible for organising the rendering of services*', such as managers, auditors, strategists, and consultants (ibid., p. 1352, emphasis added; Noordegraaf et al., 2014). Occupational professionals, on the other hand, refer to what are sometimes described as traditional or classic occupational groups (e.g. health care workers, social workers, police officers), or simply service professionals (Noordegraaf, 2011, p. 1352). This proposition has been considered by many authors, particularly in sectoral studies (e.g. education, health).<sup>1</sup> While focusing on different professional tensions, scholars share a normative narrative about hegemonic 'neo-liberal' or 'managerial' ideas that have led to the degradation, de-skilling, and 'proletarianisation' of existing professional identities (Calnan & Williams, 1995). Moreover, most scholars focus empirically on how managerialism affects traditional professions, typically from a perspective of victimhood or resistance. The concept of organisational professionals often appears as either a *discourse* (Evetts, 2009) or a *culture* (Brunetto, 2001), but in most cases, it lacks *agency*. Paradoxically, however, what we do know is that the very mechanisms that have diminished the role and status of traditional occupational professionalism have, in many cases, acted as a catalyst for the professionalisation of other organisational cohorts within the public sector (e.g. project managers, HR professionals, and quality assurance officers). This has often occurred through the adoption of the same mechanisms (formal qualifications, professional accreditation, and

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<sup>1</sup> For higher education, see Kallio et al. (2020); for medical professionals, see Numerato et al. (2012), for policing, see Martin (2022).

ethical standards) that have traditionally characterised the ‘old’ professions (Noordegraaf, 2007; Hodgson & Cicmil, 2007; Alvesson, 2013). Importantly, Noordegraaf (2007) notes that these are ambitions towards professionalisation, emphasising that ‘professional status’ is not a fixed, unchangeable state, but rather an object of continuous ambition and renegotiation.

Is the growth in organisational professionalism associated with the first explanation of bureaucratisation launched above (bureaucratisation caused by the absence of control) or the second (bureaucratisation caused by increasing managerial and/or political control)? Intuitively, we would argue the latter. The managerial aim of building accountable organisations seems to be a response to demands (whether political or not) of being more accountable to someone further up the hierarchy. However, this is an empirical question for our investigation into the eventual growth of the new type of bureaucratisation and what is causing it. Importantly, such an investigation, while acknowledging the importance of sectoral evidence, must prioritise macro evidence. Which tendencies do we observe *across* the public sectors? But first, we must define in somewhat more detail who these new bureaucrats are.

## 2.5 DEFINING THE NEW BUREAUCRACY

It would be a red rag to a bull to claim that the process of bureaucratisation we are presenting is absent from the literature. The argument that the expansion of bureaucratic functions within organisations constitutes an undesirable liability is an old, yet still ongoing, academic debate, dating back to management research in the 1960s under the term ‘administrative intensity’ (Tosi & Platt, 1967; Kasarda, 1973). Administrative intensity refers to the ratio of administrative positions relative to ‘front-line’ staff and typically distinguishes between personnel whose primary role is to support the organisation internally (e.g. managers and administrative groups) and those directly involved in the production of goods or services outside the organisation (e.g. professionals, front-line workers) (Andrews et al., 2017). As noted earlier, many definitions of organisational professionals are grounded in an analytical and moral polarity between this group and occupational professionals (Stronach et al., 2002). The former group is often positioned as the direct opposite of traditional professions and is frequently described in Machiavellian terms, where political savvy and cunning compensate for a lack of specialised skills (Reed, 1996).

However, while being a detectable group in the overall narratives of the public sector, we are dealing with a heterogeneous group of professionals. In his seminal work on organisational structures, Mintzberg (1979) describes different organisational configurations, based on functional differentiation, where different environments and levels of technology affect the balance between the different parts of the organisation. In this context, he distinguishes the

*techno-structure* and the *strategic apex* from the rest of the organisation. While the former is made up of those key actors necessary to support the operating core, the latter has the role of making sure that the mission of the organisation is on track. However, while representing a good foundation for identifying the new public bureaucracy, these are two rather broad categories. Andrews et al. (2017) talk about the ‘central administrative function’ of the organisation which is defined as

... those personnel with no direct role in service production, such as the senior management team, corporate services (e.g. finance, human resources, IT, marketing) and other workers providing services to the whole of an organisation. (Andrews et al., 2017, p. 116)

Noordegraaf et al. (2014) provide us with a different, yet very similar, definition based on the job function where organisational professionals are workers who are responsible for ‘organising and organisational improvement’ (ibid., p. 24). By contrast, definitions of *occupational professionals* pertain more to identity (Elliott, 1972), or to skills (Whitley, 1989). To be clear, our definition of the new public bureaucracy only takes account of functions pertaining to the *general management* of the organisations (Allison, 1983) containing functions related to *strategy, managing internal components* (e.g. staffing and performance), *external constituencies* (communication, public relations, etc.), and other accountability relationships. We are not including the rather broad groups of unskilled and semi-skilled clerical, administrative, and technical workers which – although having been reduced in numbers in recent years (see Chapter 3) – still populate many public sector organisations. Even though many of these predominantly provide services to the organisation (rather than to groups outside), they do not represent a new occupational group. Table 2.2 summarises the different ‘systems’ and the type of bureaucracy (asterisks) we are referring to.

Although this distinction is useful for defining our unit of analysis, we acknowledge its limitations. First, following Abbott (1988) and Noordegraaf

Table 2.2 *Defining organisational professionals*

Hierarchical levels	Front office	Back office
Managerial level	Occupational managers (senior doctors, head teachers, etc.)	Senior management team*
Professional	Street-level bureaucrats	Corporate services*
Clerical, technical	Front desk staff	Office clerks, maintenance, ICT support, etc.

Note: \* denotes type of bureaucracy.

(see above), we recognise the need to avoid the pedantic pursuit of exact definitions of professions and rigid boundaries between them. Instead, we view professions as components of broader 'ecosystems' rather than as static entities. While we will identify different types of professions, we fully acknowledge that this classification will not be exact and that many borderline cases exist.

Second, our definition reflects the traditional dichotomy between frontline and back-office 'workers' in service delivery. However, with the rise of modern office organisations (including call centres) and the digitisation of work, this distinction has gradually blurred (Zomerdijk & de Vries, 2007).

Third, the distinction does not account for 'hybrid' roles, where occupational professionals are promoted or seconded to managerial or organisational positions within the organisation while still maintaining a connection to their original profession. Modern literature on professionalism extensively discusses work identities that span the boundary between 'traditional' professions and 'managerial' roles (Noordegraaf, 2007; Blomgren & Waks, 2015; Giacomelli, 2020). Furthermore, traditional professions may develop organisational professional traits without assuming managerial roles. For example, university staff are increasingly adopting administrative responsibilities – raising external research income, managing grants, and discussing research priorities – sometimes placing more emphasis on these tasks than on conducting research itself (Moutsios, 2023).

Fourth, we do not view the new bureaucracy as a purely neo-liberal ideological construct, but rather as a broader attempt to manage accountability, shaped by a wide range of political demands and public values. Some will argue that new rights protection roles in public sector organisations, such as those related to safety, sustainability, gender, and ethnic diversity, represent the ideological antithesis of neo-liberal thinking, managerialism and modern forms of accountability. Without delving into a political theory debate, we highlight the growing body of literature suggesting that neo-liberal thinking and human rights are, in fact, more interconnected than current political discourse acknowledges (Jenson & Levi, 2013).

Finally, we must address the classical issue of demarcation between the public and private sectors and the significance of maintaining sharp distinctions (Bozeman, 1987). Many job functions in the public sector are now being performed by contractors and consultants from the private sector. This creates a grey area that complicates efforts to estimate the size and composition of the public sector workforce. However, it is likely that this trend will lead to the development of new organisational functions within the remaining public sector (procurement is one notable example).

That said, despite these complexities, we maintain that it is still possible to broadly distinguish between different workforce groupings within public sector organisations and identify some overarching trends. The group we have

identified as organisational professionals is, in one way or another, involved in managing accountability or chains of accountability – whether that involves monitoring, holding others accountable, or shielding the organisation from external actors seeking to impose accountability. While the forces of managerialism and politicisation described in Chapter 1 may be the ultimate driver of these accountability demands, we cannot overlook the professionalising ambitions of the groups we have discussed in this chapter, which also play a significant role in the transformation of bureaucracy.

## 3. Comparing public sectors and the new public bureaucracy

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This chapter aims both to describe the historical foundations of the respective public administrations and to present key data on changes in the public sector workforce, including the growth of organisational professionals. While we do not subscribe rigidly to the idea of institutional path dependencies that shape distinct administrative trajectories and cultures in the two bureaucratic systems, the nuances of the occupational changes we present are influenced by historical and institutional factors. Both countries have taken incremental steps towards modern public administrations, and by tracing this longer historical journey, we seek to avoid a reductionist approach that reduces everything to managerial reforms. Furthermore, as our three cases will demonstrate, a more nuanced understanding of these developments requires an examination of specific organisations and sectors. However, it is equally important to consider the broader public sector context. While the lack of high-quality workforce data makes direct comparison between the two countries challenging, we can still identify some shared patterns.

### 3.1 NEW ZEALAND

#### 3.1.1 The Historical Foundations of the New Zealand Bureaucracy

The first administration of New Zealand was part of the landing party in 1840, with the first Lieutenant-Governor, Hobson, establishing the foundations of New Zealand public administration modelled on the typical British crown colony pattern (Polaschek, 1958).<sup>1</sup> The Treaty of Waitangi (*Te Tiriti o Waitangi*) had, in February that year, established New Zealand as a crown colony, with the Crown aiming to secure the protection of the indigenous Māori interests, regulating British subjects, and securing commercial and political interests. Following the Crown's enactment of responsible government in 1856,

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<sup>1</sup> The first year following the Treaty, New Zealand was an arm of the colony of New South Wales and first became a separate crown colony in 1841.

ministerial responsibility for the colony's civil service was transferred from London to New Zealand. Although ties to the motherland were intact on a formal level until the ratification of the Westminster Statute in 1947 (with the 1986 Constitution Act finally removing the last weak provisions for the UK parliament to make laws for New Zealand), the country was, with respect to its bureaucracy, acting independently almost from the very beginning.

The New Zealand system shares many features with other Westminster systems, such as parliamentary sovereignty, an uncodified constitution, concentration of power in cabinet government, ministerial responsibility to parliament, and a non-partisan civil service (Rhodes et al., 2009). While there has been a shift away from the claim that 'New Zealand is more Westminster than Westminster itself' (Lijphart, 1999), following the change from a first-past-the-post to a mixed-member proportional voting system in 1995, and a gradual acceptance of political advisers, much of the current bureaucracy remains aligned with similar 'Anglophone' systems. That said, there are a few areas where New Zealand stands apart.

First, New Zealand is a treaty nation with constitutional conventions acknowledging the indigenous population's special rights and privileges. Although the Treaty principles were not fully recognised by the government and legal system until the late twentieth century, they became a serious constitutional convention after the 1975 Land March and the establishment of Treaty tribunals. These principles are now entrenched through the 2020 Public Service Act as a foundational element for the civil service.

Second, following the failed attempt in the 1870s to establish a federal (or at least quasi-federal) organisation of the original colony through the creation of 'provinces' (like British North America/Canada and Australia), the mechanisms for governing the country have been highly centralised. The powerlessness of local governments, coupled with a patchwork of weak local and regional boards, committees, and trusts, has perpetuated this tendency towards centralisation.

Third, ideas of a more modern bureaucracy arrived late in the nineteenth century. Throughout the colonial period, recruitment and appointments were based on the discretion of individual cabinet ministers. This led to political patronage, a lack of uniformity in appointments, widespread use of temporary workers, incompetent staff (including illiterates), and, not least, systemic corruption within the civil service. It was not until the Hunt Commission and the subsequent Public Service Act of 1912 that a politically neutral Public Service Commission, with full responsibility for all state servants, was established. This laid the foundation for a professional, standardised, and politically impartial civil service based on strict, systematised rules for recruitment, promotion, and career development. It also created a clear demarcation between administrative and political functions in government.

The 1962 McCarthy Commission, and the subsequent State Services Act, changed the role of what became the State Service Commission, transforming it into an overseeing body focused on departmental efficiency and adopting a more scientific approach to public administration. The commission's report prescribed the message that 'responsibility should be clear and should be matched by power' (quoted in Henderson, 1990, p. 292). While the McCarthy Commission sought to implement further reforms regarding appointment procedures for permanent heads, the government at the time was more focused on pay and industrial issues (Martin, 2006). Thus, it is not entirely misplaced to assert that the relationship between politics and administration has been – and remains – one of the key issues in New Zealand bureaucracy.

### **3.1.2 Reforms in New Zealand**

The 1970s and 1980s in New Zealand were marked by challenging economic conditions, during which traditional financial policies and regulations were seen as unsustainable. In response, radical innovations emerged out of the need for significant change. Three major reforms in the 1980s – the State-Owned Enterprises Act 1986, the State Sector Act 1988, and the Public Finance Act 1989 (combined with the Employment Contracts Act 1991) – led to a transformation in both the structure and culture of the public sector. This transformation resulted in decentralisation of managerial discretion, fragmentation of the sector, and the separation of functions.

The first of these acts (the 1986 State-Owned Enterprises Act) established basic principles for parts of the public sector with 'trading' or 'service-to-consumer' functions (e.g. utilities, transport). These functions were to be governed by commercial principles, with corporate boards composed of individuals with commercial experience, operating in competitive markets, and with an eventual goal of full privatisation. Most of the newly established state-owned enterprises were sold off to private entities in the late 1980s and early 1990s, including, for example, the national railway service, the Bank of New Zealand, and the large commercial side of the Ministry of Works (see Chapter 4 on the transport agency). In addition to the direct privatisation of public assets and operations, subsequent policies encouraged a functional separation between policy and implementation, with the latter subject to competitive tendering and outsourcing.

The 1988 State Sector Act established some radical structural changes in the management and governance of public sector organisations. In particular, the change in the management of ministries and departments meant that all employment decisions were devolved from the State Service Commission (SSC) to the new roles of appointed chief executives (CEs) with personal responsibility for finances and adherence to various performance management and

accountability mechanisms (Scott, 2001). The new CEs also became employers, in their own right, of all staff within their purview and were instructed to act independently on staff matters without any interference from ministers. Thus, while retaining control over overall employment policies within the government and contractual accountability between the chief executive and the SSC (and the minister), most employment discretion was delegated to CEs.

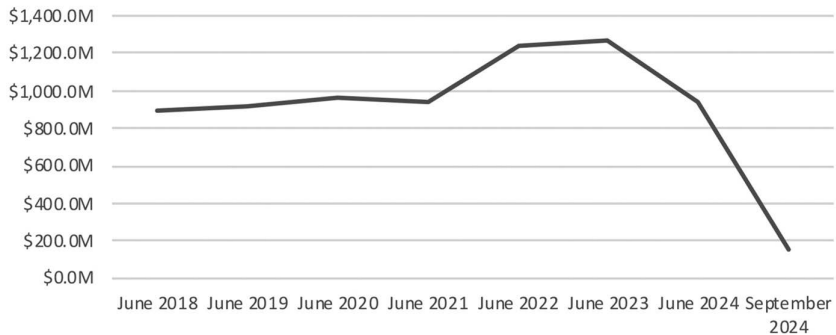
The third act, the 1989 Public Service Act, introduced a new system to public finances with clearer accountability mechanisms. Many of the previous administrative control functions were removed, and CEs were made responsible for financial management and introduced new reporting requirements. In terms of financial management, the Act replaces cash-based accounting with accrual principles emphasising outputs. This emphasis on outputs meant a focus on 'deliverables' subjected to performance measures such as cost, quality, volume, and so on. It also meant instructions to CEs and more flexibility for them to attain the government's desired outcomes. All in all, these reforms strengthened the organisational character of public administration.

Following the first radical phase, a second phase emerged around 1999, marking an evolution in which some of the changes from the initial reforms were consolidated (e.g. the contracting model), some were reversed (e.g. some of the privatisation of state-owned enterprises), and others were reviewed and renewed (Boston & Eichbaum, 2007). Among the latter were challenges related to securing accountability within the new system, involving politicians, CEs, and other key participants (Schick, 1996). Numerous efforts have been made to address these accountability issues, including the 2004 Crown Entities Act, which established general principles for governing the diverse range of state service organisations (Löfgren et al., 2018).

Regarding the public sector workforce, the National Party Government in 2009, partly in response to the global financial crisis, decided to cap and limit the growth of public service staffing. The SSC was tasked with monitoring this development, with CEs actively expected to manage staffing levels. The cap also placed particular emphasis on reducing the number of communications and public relations advisers (Cabinet Office, 2009). This cap was lifted by the Labour government in 2018 following a review (Office of the Minister of State Services, 2018). The review highlighted several unintended negative consequences, such as 'gaming' employment figures (e.g. reclassifying or re-categorising staff), a shift in focus from staff quality to sheer numbers, and creating 'perverse incentives towards contracting services instead of maintaining in-house capability' (Office of the Minister of State Services, 2018, para. 9.1).

However, the argument that lifting the cap would reduce consultancy and contractor costs is contradicted by the actual data. The costs for consultants

continued to increase after the cap was lifted (as demonstrated in Figure 3.1) until a new government took office in late 2023.



Source: Public Service Commission/Te Kawa Mataaho (2024).

*Figure 3.1 Total costs for contractors and consultants in the public service 2018–2024*

In more recent years, the New Zealand public administration has been characterised by various governments launching several flagship programmes such as Better Public Services (BPS), Performance Improvement Framework (PIF), regulatory stewardships, ‘the spirit of the service’, well-being budgets, and social investments. These innovations have at least two things in common (Macaulay, 2020). First, they have all been presented by various governments as innovative reforms aiming to break away from the managerial pathways of the 1980s and 1990s and have in particular been acclaimed as successful illustrations of post-NPM in the academic literature (Boston & Eichbaum, 2007). This despite the fact that some of these innovations had been tried unsuccessfully elsewhere in the world (e.g. the performance improvement framework, which was a carbon copy of the UK and Australian capability reviews), or were just a recycling of old ideas (e.g. spirit of the service<sup>2</sup>). Second, they have in most cases not lasted long enough to leave any significant institutional footprints. In fact, most of them have not even survived their governments. Over the years, several voices have claimed the demise of, or at least a drift away from, the managerial regime of public services in New Zealand (Norman & Gregory, 2003; Whitcombe, 2008). Meanwhile, existing accountability and

<sup>2</sup> The concept can be traced back to both the first Public Service Act in 1912 as well as to the original rules of the Civil Service Association in 1890.

performance mechanisms have remained untouched. In particular, the 2020 Public Service Act has been acknowledged as a giant leap away from the managerialism of the 1980s, with an emphasis on a unified public service, accompanied by a new ‘spirit of service’ (Scott & Macaulay, 2020), a reinvention of Crown–Māori relations, the establishment of various interdepartmental arrangements, and in general a more systemic (‘stewardship’) approach towards public services, abandoning the managerial and fragmented legacy of the NPM period. The new Act also indicates a return to the 1912 reform with the name change of the State Service Commission to Te Kawa Mataaho/Public Service Commission, paying tribute to both the historical heritage as well as the bicultural constitutional conventions of the country. Against this more official narrative, other voices claim that the post-NPM narrative is no more than a myth, as managerial ideas planted in the 1980s have become firmly entrenched in the New Zealand administration (Lodge & Gill, 2011; Donadelli & Lodge, 2019). Unsurprisingly, the emphasis on control, leadership, and accountability has survived through the winds of change since the 1980s.

‘Command and control’ management styles, a ‘right to manage’ mentality, and a cult of (senior) leadership are rife across the sector. (Haworth & Pilott, 2014, p. 75)

In conclusion, the history of New Zealand’s bureaucracy may look volatile from the outside but it also comprises some rather stable tensions between autonomy and control, between innovation and continuity, and not least between politics and administration.

### 3.1.3 The New Zealand Bureaucrat

The rules and structures governing employment in the civil service following responsible government in 1856 were, for most of the nineteenth century, quite rudimentary. Civil servants relied on the benevolence of the appointing Cabinet Minister, which was often characterised by political patronage and a preference for fixed-term contracts, offering greater flexibility. There was a lack of uniformity in working conditions and employment terms across different parts of the Civil Service. While there was gradual improvement in working conditions over the years, including the introduction of salary regulations, security of tenure, promotions, and entrance examinations for cadets, the substantial transition to a modern bureaucracy was a slow process.

The 1912 Public Service Act introduced a new order to employment in the civil service. It marked the end of individual ministers managing staffing matters and established a new body – the Public Service Commission – to oversee all employment-related issues in government. This change created a more uniform civil service, drastically reducing the number of temporary

employees, providing workers' rights, and implementing more systematic practices in recruitment, grading, and scaling. Until the post-war period, the service remained characterised by a rather 'traditional' merit-based principle, classifying staff based on grading (Polaschek, 1958, p. 132).

The Second World war and the subsequent enlistment of civil servants in the armed forces created a shortage of staff and capabilities in the civil service, which took years to resolve and accentuated the increase of female staff. Although there is a gradual increase in 'professional' and 'administrative' staff with university qualifications, the dominance of clerical staff – often cadets ('boys') recruited straight from high school through entry exams – remained significant. For example, among the permanent staff in 1955/1956, this group represented 31 per cent of the total civil service workforce (*ibid.*, p. 134). And of the total workforce, only 4 per cent held university degrees (*ibid.*, p. 147). In contrast, the current public service workforce is much better educated, with no less than 49.9 per cent of them holding a bachelor's degree or higher in 2021 (Service IQ, 2021).

As mentioned in the previous section, following the golden years of the 1950s and 1960s with an ever-expanding public sector, the New Zealand bureaucracy was put under pressure in the 1970s due to oil price shocks, spiralling inflation, and growing unemployment. The public service was increasingly seen as a burden that had grown out of control by various governments, and in 1975 the first freeze on new staff was imposed. Meanwhile, new computer technologies were gradually taking over paperwork in public service offices and began to threaten the employment of the large cohorts of typists.

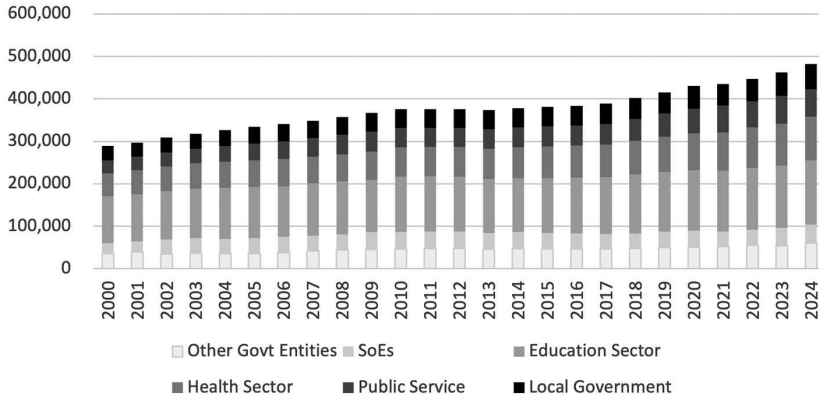
### **3.1.4 The Growth of Organisational Professionals**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, workforce statistics for the New Zealand public sector have, in many cases, been rudimentary and fragmented, with some organisations being more rigorous in collating their staff data. The data show that the public sector employed around 481,500 people in February 2024, 19.2 per cent of New Zealand's total workforce (2,502,800). The majority (88 per cent) work in central government (423,300), and 12 per cent in local government (58,200). Please note that both the educational and health sectors are part of central government. Figure 3.2 provides a crude breakdown of the development since 2000.

If we look at the long-term development (Figure 3.3), we can clearly notice the effects of the reforms in the 1980s (and to a lesser extent the cap from 2009 to 2018).

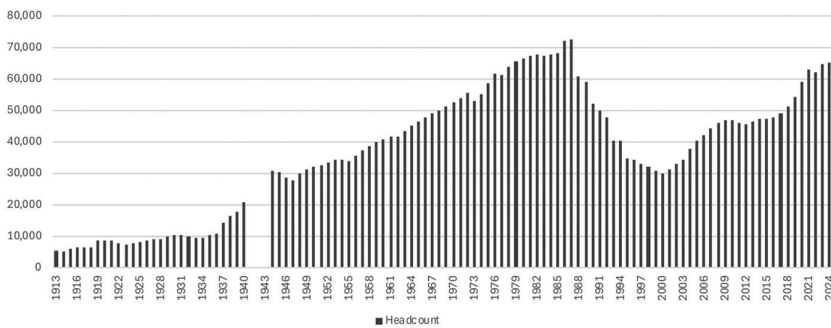
In terms of available data, the workforce statistics on the public service have been better recorded than in other parts with more details on different professional categories. The New Zealand public service is the executive part

of central government and comprises ministerial departments, several agencies (although not all), and some other entities. Although it does not cover the whole public sector, it represents a significant share of it. A crude headcount/full-time equivalent (FTE) demonstrates the growth since the establishment of a unified public administration in New Zealand (Table 3.1).



Note: SoE: State-owned enterprises.  
 Source: Public Service Commission/Te Kawa Mataaho (2024).

Figure 3.2 Public sector workforce (2000–2024) based on sectors in New Zealand



Source: Public Service Commission/Te Kawa Mataaho (2024).

Figure 3.3 Changes in the New Zealand public service workforce 1913–2024 (headcount)

*Table 3.1 Public service workforce in New Zealand based on occupational groups*

Public service workforce 2013–2023	Change (%)
Managers	57
Policy Analysts	43
Information Professionals	84
Social, Health, and Education Workers	30
ICT Professionals and Technicians	33
Legal, HR, and Finance Professionals	52
Other Professionals not elsewhere included	60
Inspectors and Regulatory Officers	19
Contact Centre Workers	11
Clerical and Administrative Workers	30
Other Occupations	–5
Grand Total	42

*Source:* Public Service Commission/Te Kawa Mataaho (2024).

In terms of the overall number, public services have increased from 45,895 FTE in 2013 to 63,117 FTE in 2023. The workforce data operate with ten different groups covering no fewer than 239 different occupations (as of 2023). The two largest groups are regulatory officers (including police and correction officers) and social, health, and education workers. Although these two groups have grown, their shares of the total workforce have been declining over time. Meanwhile, other professional groups demonstrate more significant changes.

The most notable detail in this table is the information professional group, which has increased by a staggering 84 per cent between 2013 and 2023. In real numbers (FTE), this represents an increase from 5,126 to 9,426. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Public Service Commission (PSC) comments on their website:

The third largest group, information professionals, has 14.9% of all the Public Service workforce. This is the highest level on record – the share of this group has increased steadily since records began in 2007. Part of this growth involves the design and support of digital services. Information professionals encompass various roles, such as data analysts, business and intelligence analysts, service designers, non-policy advisors, librarians, archivists, project managers, statisticians, and governance roles. (Public Service Commission/Te Kawa Mataaho, 2024)

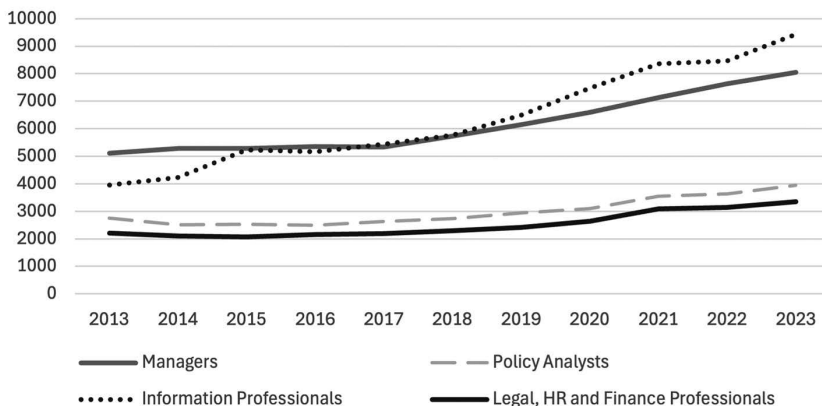
It is important to note that this group does not include traditional ICT (Information and Communications Technology) professionals, an occupational

category that has not seen significant changes in the past ten years, despite the digitalisation efforts of the government. Additionally, it is worth highlighting that the category of managers appears to have experienced higher growth compared with other occupational groups. The PSC comments on this with the following statement:

[The annual] proportional growth of managers at 5.4% is the slowest since 2017, although some of this historic growth reflects changes in how agencies code their roles to occupation groups, rather than recruitment of new managers. Managers may be working in a wide variety of roles, such as, service delivery managers, contact centre managers or court security managers. (Public Service Commission/ Te Kawa Mataaho, 2024)

If we compare those groups which most align with our definitions of organisational professionals, we notice that the two groups, information professionals and managers, have experienced higher growth rates, although all these groups have expanded above average in terms of percentage (Figure 3.4).

It should be noted that the figures do not account for the recent developments following the new coalition government taking office in the second half of 2023. As part of the coalition agreement, all departments and agencies have been instructed to reduce their workforce by 6.5 per cent. Radio New Zealand reported in June 2024 that no fewer than 6,000 jobs had been disestablished, primarily affecting back-office positions in Wellington. Still, both public sector and public service personnel have increased steadily since the turn of the millennium.



Source: Public Service Commission/Te Kawa Mataaho (2024).

Figure 3.4 Changes in New Zealand professionals within the public service 2013–2023 (FTE)

## 3.2 SWEDEN

### 3.2.1 The Historical Foundations of the Swedish Bureaucracy

While the New Zealand state was established in the nineteenth century, modelled on its colonial motherland, the evolution of Swedish bureaucracy has a much longer history. Codified instructions for public administration have existed since 1634 with the enactment of the ‘Instruction of Government Act’. Sweden’s rise as an imperial power in the seventeenth century – marked by the establishment of a militaristic state, the introduction of a national and systematic tax collection model, and state-directed economic expansion – fuelled the rapid development of a comprehensive state administration. This included the creation of large, functionally specialised state agencies (independent of the King), a regionalised state administration (county administrative boards) led by a county governor, and a partly autonomous judiciary.

Following the decline of Swedish imperial ambitions and the shift away from absolutist monarchy in the early eighteenth century (along with the subsequent strengthening of parliament), a relatively autonomous administration emerged under a progressive new constitution during the Age of Liberty (1720–1772). Although the claim that ‘the structure of the Swedish central administration has remained intact for 350 years’ (Molander et al., 2002, p. 148) may seem exaggerated, it is impossible to ignore the enduring features of this historical legacy.

Most importantly, the system of autonomous government agencies is based on a division of power between a small government council and significant state agencies, though the constitutional foundations of administrative autonomy are relatively weak (Bull & Sterzel, 2013). The most significant formal expression of this constitutional dualism is the principle that government decisions are collective – an individual minister cannot make decisions independently. This reduces the decision-making discretion of Swedish ministers in relation to their subordinate agencies. Additionally, the Constitution (the Instrument of Government, ch. 7, art. 3; ch. 12, art. 2) enshrines the principle that the government cannot interfere in individual agency cases.

Together, these two principles require a high degree of coordination among ministers to ‘instruct’ the agencies, making the Swedish government an organisation characterised by negotiation (Larsson, 1995). As a result, individual ministers are weak, particularly in relation to the prime minister, and even more so in coalition governments, where ministers from smaller parties often find their hands tied. The collective decision-making principle also prevents potential alliances between ministers and agencies. Nevertheless, this

negotiation-based structure enables the government to act as a collective entity with strong capabilities when needed (Page, 2012).

The structural divide between a comparatively minor government office (at present representing 2 per cent of the state sector workforce, and far below 1 per cent of all public sector employees in Sweden) and the large government agencies provides the strongest empirical foundation for administrative autonomy in Sweden. It is simply impossible for the small centre to manage the vast public sector landscape. The government mainly solves this challenge through the *delegation* of tasks to subordinate levels (Jacobsson & Sundström, 2015). Since the 1970s, this has primarily been rolled out through ‘decentralisation’ of local and regional responsibilities for the welfare state (about 80 per cent of the public sector workforce are employed by local and regional governments).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, many agencies are expected to take a lead and function as a facilitating ‘arena’ for a specific sector and have also, during the 2000s, been tasked with the development of markets (*ibid.*; see also Chapter 4).

It is widely debated whether this convention of autonomy represents a strength or a problem for the political system. Apart from the advantages in terms of confidence in expertise, trust, and autonomy, the far-reaching transparency and freedom of expression among Swedish public servants are often considered to be important for efficient and innovative behaviour within the bureaucracy, in addition to the close relationship between ministers and public servants in the comparatively small Government Office (*cf.* Page, 2012; Hall, 2015).

However, the culture of autonomy has also faced significant criticism for fostering a system in which ‘nobody’ governs or takes responsibility (let alone accountability) for governance. This has led to inertia, government failure, and blame-avoidance behaviours (Molander et al., 2002). Over the past few decades, there has been increasing pressure for better governance structures, tighter control over agencies (as well as regional and local governments) through performance management mechanisms, and, importantly, more rigorous accountability frameworks (SOU 1993, p. 16). These demands have often aligned with political efforts to reduce public expenditure – particularly during the fiscal crisis of the early 1990s – by promoting results-based management and requiring annual reductions in operational spending across government agencies (Sundström, 2006). Essentially, what is often referred to as NPM reforms is an attempt to address governance challenges within the Swedish state apparatus.

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<sup>3</sup> Whether the delegation of responsibilities to subordinate government levels should be labelled decentralisation is a heavily contested issue in Sweden.

However, the institutional structure, characterised by small ministries attached to large operational agencies, has largely remained unchanged. At the same time, there has been a push to merge previously regionalised agencies – such as the Tax Agency, the Social Insurance Agency, and the police – into large, centralised organisations. While the official aim has been to standardise service quality, improving governability from the centre has been a key driving force.

Another substantial component of the Swedish administrative model is the increasing role of regional and local governments, particularly from the 1970s onward. This is where Sweden diverges most significantly from New Zealand. Although Sweden is formally a unitary state, there is a long-standing tradition of local self-government, which is constitutionally entrenched in the first paragraph of the 1974 Instrument of Government. Local self-government operates on two levels: local governments and regions (the latter primarily responsible for health care). Historically, local government has been the level of government with the strongest democratic legitimacy. Swedish local and regional governments are more than just local governance institutions; they are also independent, sanctioned administrative bodies with the constitutional authority to levy taxes.

One of the most significant tensions in implementing welfare policies is the balance between local governments as self-determined democratic units and their role as the implementing arms of national policies. Around 80 per cent of the public sector workforce is employed within local and regional governments, which accounts for nearly one-fifth of the total Swedish workforce (Statistics Sweden Workforce Data, online resource, 2025). Therefore, devolution has become a defining feature of the Swedish administrative model. However, it is important to distinguish between the centralisation of social insurance systems (such as pensions, sick leave, etc.), which have become increasingly unified, and the delivery of welfare state services. Local governments have historically held, or in recent years have been delegated, responsibilities for services such as primary and secondary education, childcare, elderly care, disability services, social security, environmental enforcement, and the integration of newly arrived immigrants (Hall, 2015).

### **3.2.2 Reforms in Sweden**

As in New Zealand, there is no doubt that the Swedish public sector has been heavily influenced by managerial ideas from the private sector since the 1980s. However, the pattern of implementation has been far from straightforward, and practices often vary significantly across different sectors. Unlike New Zealand, there have been no distinct ‘formative moments’ that shaped these reforms.

The most far-reaching and contested reform in the Swedish public sector has been the introduction of market mechanisms in welfare delivery, including in primary and secondary education, primary health care, and social welfare. Beginning in the mid-1990s, these sectors saw the establishment of quasi-markets (Le Grand, 1991), where public funding for welfare services was converted into individual vouchers. Parents of schoolchildren, patients, and vulnerable groups were encouraged to choose their providers from a list of accredited options, whether public or private. These reforms have been politically controversial, not only because they marked a stark departure from the previous welfare system but also because they allowed private providers to profit from taxpayer-funded services.

The impact of these reforms on public administration has shifted the operational focus towards managing and preserving competition (Jacobsson & Sundström, 2015). Local and regional governments remain responsible for organising the welfare markets, such as coordinating school choices for parents and students. Meanwhile, national agencies are accountable for overseeing these sectors, ensuring quality assurance, and setting national standards for monitoring and evaluation. Many of these reforms, implemented in the 1990s, aimed to foster competition between providers to improve public sector services. Similarly, public sector innovation has been expected to grow through tendering competitions and public procurement, which in 2021 accounted for 16.2 per cent of Sweden's gross domestic product (GDP) (OECD, 2023). One notable example, which we will explore further, is the Swedish Transport Agency's efforts to foster a more innovative market for infrastructure construction by outsourcing a greater share of operational activities to private vendors.

Second, the growing policy emphasis on competition and markets, particularly the increasing perception of citizens as customers, has led many policy sectors to adopt corporate structures. At least on a superficial level, public sector organisations now operate more like private companies in their external communications and visibility, including identity and branding efforts that present them as individual entities rather than as bureaucratic authorities (Hall, 2013).

Internally, organisational structures have also shifted: 'communication' has replaced 'information' (Fredriksson et al., 2015), the role of 'recruitment' has been overtaken by 'HR', bureaucratic tasks are now framed as 'projects', local governments increasingly 'benchmark' their performance against other organisations, and executive positions have been more clearly modelled after their private sector counterparts. As in other parts of the Western world, managerialism has become influential, but these changes are not without ambiguity. Thus, within core areas of the Swedish bureaucracy, such as taxation, social insurance, and the police, the space for autonomous management has narrowed. Previously independent agencies have been consolidated into unified

national agencies to enhance political governability. This has created a tension between politics and management, a dynamic also observed in New Zealand (Hall, 2015).

Third, one of the most significant effects of managerialism across Swedish public sector organisations is the introduction of delegated financial accountability, or cost units, with tight financial steering and accrual accounting. These reforms emerged from the fiscal crisis of the early 1990s, during which the Ministry of Finance assumed a more central role in the Swedish budgeting process. Annual efficiency targets were imposed on state agencies, along with goal- and result-based management across the public sector (Sundström, 2006). Unit managers, even at the subunit level, were empowered to commit expenditures and incur liabilities or debts, with the objective of balancing their budgets. Budget transfers or negotiations between units are generally prohibited, and assistance between organisational units, even within the same organisation, is subject to liabilities (Wällstedt & Almqvist, 2017).

Although maintaining a balanced budget was always a priority before these reforms, the introduction of annual efficiency demands and delegated budgetary responsibility marked a significant shift. This structure effectively incentivises public sector managers to prioritise their own budgets and focus on activities that generate revenues and reimbursements, aligning with specific redistribution systems (such as funding for students in universities, pupils in schools, and patients in health care). This development closely mirrors the situation in New Zealand, although the reforms there were implemented more drastically.

Fourth, as in New Zealand and other industrialised democracies, performance management systems have become essential tools for ensuring accountability in public sector organisations. This focus on performance is closely tied to outputs and services ('value for money'), aligning with managerial principles. The drive for performance-based systems has steered bureaucratic behaviour towards a greater emphasis on measurable and demonstrable results, evaluative exercises, and 'consumer care'. On an individual level, key performance indicators (KPIs) have replaced the traditional pay-grade system.

As with any system of performance appraisal, the definition of performance becomes crucial. Consequently, performance management is closely linked to accountability and quality control, leading to the creation of new bureaucratic functions. Still, the current performance regime is not without its critics. In Power's words, public sector organisations are struggling to be auditable (Power, 1997). Thus, the overall trend in Swedish public administration has been a shift away from autonomy towards greater control.

In the early 2010s, a backlash against this focus on performance management emerged in Sweden. This reaction against 'NPM' came much later than in New Zealand and focused more on control over the professions. The Social

Democrat-led government from 2014 to 2022 sought to introduce a model of 'trust-based management' to enhance professional autonomy relative to managerial control, partly addressing administrative burdens (Bringselius, 2018). At the national level, this model gained little traction with other political parties and barely survived the government that initiated it. However, there continues to be interest in the trust-based model at the local government level, although its implementation varies significantly across different contexts. Despite this, there is no indication that the core principles of the reforms introduced in the 1990s, such as delegated financial accountability and performance management, are being seriously challenged, which is an obvious similarity to New Zealand.

### 3.2.3 The Swedish Bureaucrat

The principles of meritocracy in the Swedish civil service became dominant at the beginning of the twentieth century (Sundell, 2013). Like many other European countries, graduates from law schools traditionally dominated the public sector. In fact, a law degree was nearly a requirement for obtaining a professional position in the Government Offices until the 1960s (Ehn, 2015). However, economists, natural scientists, and engineers also played significant roles in public sector agencies during Sweden's industrial transformation in the early twentieth century. These groups often moved between business, politics, and bureaucracy, particularly in relation to economic development. During the post-war era, especially from the 1970s onwards, social scientists became the dominant group within the public sector bureaucracy.

Since the 1960s, public sector employment has gradually started to resemble its private sector counterpart, long before the advent of managerialism. In 1976, the specific criminal liabilities associated with public sector positions were removed (with a few exceptions, such as bribery). Collective bargaining was introduced in the 1960s, and public servants were granted the right to take industrial action against their employer. In 1989, individual and performance-based remuneration systems were introduced, replacing the existing pay-grade structure. Perhaps most importantly, in the 1990s, full responsibility for human resources (HR) and employer functions was delegated to individual agencies, as in New Zealand (Ehn, 2015). The once heavily regulated and detailed government instructions for size and composition of the public sector workforce have been removed. One of the effects is a true plethora of job titles within the bureaucracy. Another effect, as in New Zealand, is a stronger focus on public administration as consisting of separate organisations (Alamaa et al., 2025).

Appointments of agency heads (Directors General, DGs) have become more tightly controlled by successive governments over the years, with contracts typically not lasting longer than six years. It has also become easier to remove

these heads by seconding them to posts outside their agencies, often within the Government Offices, which is sometimes referred to as the 'Elephants' Graveyard'. As a result, DGs are now more directly controlled by the government, suggesting a shift towards stronger political oversight of Swedish agencies, despite the delegation of HR responsibilities (Hall, 2015).

The adoption of private sector practices is also evident in other changes. The public sector lacks a tailored ethical code for its staff, and there is no standardised training programme for public servants. While there are some legal provisions, such as various parts of the Constitution and the 2017 Administrative Act, many public servants never engage with this legislation throughout their careers. Thus, while the culture of a relatively autonomous public administration remains strong, the role of the Constitution within public sector workplaces is weak (*ibid.*).

The massive expansion of the welfare state from the 1960s onward, particularly at local government level, has made the role of the 'bureaucrat' and career paths within the bureaucracy much more diverse. In many ways, it is the professional cultures of the welfare state – established through traditional professional degree programmes – that provide uniformity within the public sector. Medical and educational professions do not have a distinct public sector identity, as practitioners can work in both the private and public sectors (and increasingly do so due to privatisation reforms). This means that the professional identities and expertise of these individuals shape the public bureaucracy, rather than the bureaucracy defining their roles. However, this professional dominance is less apparent at the top levels of national government and central agencies, where generalist skills, such as law and social sciences, are in high demand.

Another trend visible in the Swedish public sector is that staff with traditional professional backgrounds (such as teachers, health professionals, etc.) often advance their careers within the administration of their organisations, becoming what is known as hybrid professionals (Blomgren & Waks, 2015). However, as already noted, the most common educational background among new graduates at the state level is a degree in a social science subject (including economics). The upskilling of the public workforce, with university degrees as an entry requirement, is probably the most significant trend within the public sector bureaucracy in recent decades. While most state employees lacked a university degree as late as the 1990s, more than 80 per cent of them now hold some form of university qualification. Regional counties and local governments have followed a similar path, though at a slower pace, with nearly 60 per cent of employees holding higher educational qualifications as of 2019.

### 3.2.4 The Growth of Organisational Professionals

In total, the Swedish public bureaucracy employed approximately 1.45 million people in 2023, making up about 29 per cent of the total Swedish workforce (compared with 19 per cent in New Zealand). Of this, 60 per cent are employed by local government, while 20 per cent are employed by regional governments and another 20 per cent by the state. This pear-shaped structure contrasts sharply with the situation in New Zealand. While the primary focus of this book is on state agencies, it is worth briefly examining the development within Swedish local and regional governments as well (Table 3.2).

The percentage changes are notable, as they show that advanced administrative positions are increasing at a faster pace, while less advanced administrative roles are growing more slowly than the sector's average. Advanced administrative positions include both organisational professionals and the more politically oriented group of policy analysts and caseworkers who support the political side of government. Among the groups experiencing the highest growth (greater than 100 per cent), we find ICT professionals, procurement officers, communicators, and policy analysts in the education sector. It is important to note that the total share of management and administration within Swedish local and regional governments remains low (14.4 per cent in 2023), especially considering that most welfare services (such as health care, elderly care, early education, social services, and primary education) are delivered in these sectors. Nevertheless, the data clearly indicate that organisational professionals are growing at a significantly higher rate than other public sector employees, while low-skill administrative positions are showing very different growth patterns.

*Table 3.2 Local and regional government workforce changes 2008–2023*

Occupation	Percentage increase
All employees except for management and administration	15
Management and administration	49
Managers within the latter group	41
Advanced administrative positions within the latter group	100
Less advanced administrative positions within the latter group	12
Grand Total	19

*Note:* FTE, 2008:  $N=833,647$ ; 2023:  $N=992,120$ .

*Source:* Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (2024).

Regarding state employees, we have attempted to apply the ANZSCO (Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations) codes to Swedish workforce statistics (Table 3.3) in order to make Sweden and New Zealand comparable.

The percentage increase in the public service in New Zealand (2013–2023) is higher than in Sweden. Like New Zealand, the organisational professional groups – managers, policy analysts, information professionals, and legal, HR, and finance professionals – have all increased above the average in Sweden as well. The biggest difference, however, is the strong expansion of ICT professionals and technicians (ranging from highly educated computer scientists to support staff) in the Swedish state in recent years. Many of the largest state agencies have developed proprietary (in-house) ICT systems, such as the transport administration and the employment agency. The most significant similarity between the two countries is that in both jurisdictions, clerical and administrative workers show an increase well below the average, supporting the claim that it is the more advanced administrative positions that are seeing the largest growth. Inspectors, regulatory officers, and social, health, and education workers are the largest groups in both New Zealand and Sweden, but their increase remains below average in both countries.

*Table 3.3 Changes among state employees in Sweden based on occupational groups 2014–2022*

State employees 2014–2022	Change (%)
Managers	26
Policy Analysts	24
Information Professionals	31
Social, Health, and Education Workers	11
ICT Professionals and Technicians	47
Legal, HR, and Finance Professionals	23
Other Professionals not elsewhere included	40
Inspectors and Regulatory Officers	10
Contact Centre Workers	636 <sup>a</sup>
Clerical and Administrative Workers	8
Other Occupations	14
Grand Total	18

*Notes:* <sup>a</sup> Observe that this is an expansion from a very low figure in 2014. Headcounts, 2014:  $N=247,130$ ; 2022:  $N=292,119$ .

*Source:* Adapted by the authors from Statistics Sweden Workforce Data, online resource.

### 3.3 SWEDEN AND NEW ZEALAND COMPARED

Notwithstanding the challenges of comparing two distinct public sectors and the asymmetry in their change mechanisms, we can make a few general observations about the reforms of recent decades that indicate similarities. First, while the legislative changes in New Zealand paved the way for the radical transformation of the public sector in the 1980s and 1990s, parallel changes in Sweden a decade later were driven by various attempts by the central government to decentralise responsibilities to lower levels (local governments), while employing a range of accountability instruments to maintain control. Although both trajectories resulted in a demand for stronger accountability, they are quite distinct.

Second, something observable in both countries (and globally) is how financial accountability has become deeply embedded in both sectors. Undoubtedly, the corporate concept of 'return on investment' has emerged as a critical aspect of the public sector, shaping public expectations and serving as a fundamental premise for nearly all forms of public activity. This shift is reflected in the establishment of various accountability tools. Despite the extensive discourse on 'post-NPM practices' in both academic and practitioner circles, the fact remains that financial accountability, as well as other forms of performance management, occupies a central position among various public values.

Third, the general expansion of educational achievements in the post-Second World War period in both countries has led not only to the upskilling of the workforce but also to a steady supply of graduates with social science and business-related degrees. This has not only created a pool of a certain type of graduate but has also prompted a focus on professionalising new occupational roles, particularly those centred on internal organisational matters, which in turn has driven demand for such professionals. Regarding our data, we note some differences in which specific groups have experienced increases (e.g. New Zealand has seen significant growth in 'information professionals', while ICT professionals have experienced a much stronger expansion in Sweden). However, the overall conclusion is that these groups of organisational professionals have experienced a higher growth rate than some of the more 'traditional' groups, as well as the lesser-skilled administrative groups.<sup>4</sup>

Fourth and finally, the tension between politics and public administration is probably age-old, but it seems that the reforms of the late twentieth century intensified it. To take a concrete example, the delegation of human

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the public sectors in both countries, after a significant downsizing in the early 1990s in terms of employees, have increased during the 2000s.

resources and employment responsibilities to managers (such as CEs) has been a clear trajectory in both countries, which has undoubtedly strengthened the conception of public administration as consisting of separate organisations. Since organisational professionals operate close to management, this may be an important precondition for their expansion. On the other hand, political interference in what state agencies are supposed to do also seems to be increasing – at least in the politically important sectors, which we will explore in the coming chapters. Complete managerial autonomy is obviously impossible to maintain within the politically governed sector. A cautious hypothesis is that the expansion of organisational professionalism is closely linked to this tension between politics and management in both countries.

## 4. The transport agencies

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Transportation policy during the post-Second World War period was essentially a non-political policy area focused on investments in infrastructure (such as building roads, airports, etc.) with the goal of securing economic growth within a single jurisdiction. While issues such as ensuring access to all parts of the territory were driven by politicians, actual implementation was entrusted to transport agencies (Button, 2006). As a result, the policy field was primarily shaped by economists on the political strategy side (both in the policymaking realm and academic literature) and by more technical approaches focused on the execution of political decisions (engineers and planners). The values of the policy field revolved around supply and demand (efficiency and effectiveness), framed by three overarching questions: Should we make an investment? Who will pay for it? And who will regulate transportation? These questions intersected with the classical division of responsibility between the state and the market.

Over time, however, local concerns (e.g., traffic noise, toll roads) have expanded the scope of values beyond what traditional cost–benefit analyses could estimate. Transportation systems and policies now impact travel behaviour and affect accessibility, the environment, safety, health, and well-being (van Wee et al., 2023). These changes in how we perceive transportation policy are global in nature and visible in both of our case studies. In both Sweden and New Zealand, radical marketisation reforms were introduced, but by the 2000s, these reforms began to be increasingly questioned.

### 4.1 NEW ZEALAND

#### 4.1.1 Background

The modern history of what we today call the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA; or *Waka Kotahi*<sup>1</sup>) has been characterised by drastic changes and

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<sup>1</sup> The organisation adopted its Te Reo Māori name – *Waka Kotahi* – as the first part of the title of the organisation in 2019 as part of the overall government revitalisation of the language and to mark a commitment to the communities in which

restructures. Historically, land transport in New Zealand comprised a patchwork of private and public (as well as local and national) actors, with shifting responsibilities and roles over time. However, the central role of the government through the Ministry of Works was always pivotal for securing the infrastructure. The organisation, the Department of Works, was established in 1876. It swiftly became the chief actor for not only undertaking nationwide construction work such as roads, bridges, and railways,<sup>2</sup> but also for regulating land transport. Just before its abolition in the 1980s, its countrywide workforce amounted to no less than 10,000 employees. The function that mostly covers the purview of today's NZTA had its origin in the National Roads Board (founded in 1954) with a responsibility for the national highway network (with remaining public roads maintained and managed by local councils). The reforms of the 1980s described in Chapter 3 completely dismantled the existing organisations in transport policy in a radical manner (described in detail in Bollard & Pickford, 1998) and are almost identical to the Swedish trajectory (as described below). Although changes began earlier, the most significant shifts occurred in 1988, when all marketable activities of the Ministry of Works and Development (including road construction) were consolidated into a government-owned entity called the Works and Development Corporation. This corporation was later privatised in 1996. Meanwhile, the policy and regulatory functions were reassigned to various ministries and agencies. The intention behind this restructuring was to separate policymaking from service delivery, enhance accountability, and foster greater competition and innovation. The National Roads Board was subsequently transferred to the Ministry of Transport. In 1989, the government introduced further changes by passing several laws that completely reshaped the New Zealand land system (Dunlop, 1999), which included the establishment of new organisations.

- *Transit New Zealand*, a new crown agency assigned to provide integrated nationwide planning and funding of roads, passenger transport services, and road safety, was the first agency in the history of New Zealand to have an overview of all land transport (except for rail freight and infrastructure).

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they are working. The incoming centre-liberal-right wing coalition government in 2023 decided to revoke this decision and to emphasise the name in English as the first part of the title. We will hereafter use the abbreviation NZTA to simplify the story and to acknowledge the historical name of the organisation.

<sup>2</sup> The New Zealand Rail/Tranz Rail was privatised in 1996 and subsequently re-nationalised in 2008. The current state-owned enterprise KiwiRail is under the purview of the Ministry of Transport, but not the NZTA. Unlike the Swedish case, KiwiRail owns and maintains both operations and infrastructure.

- *The Land Transport Fund*, a trust receiving all the road user charges from heavy vehicles, all registration and licence fees, and a percentage of the fuel tax paid by light vehicles.
- *The Land Transport Safety Authority*, with the overall responsibility for the development of safety policy and standards.
- Regional and territorial transport planning functions involve collaboration with regional actors and national ones in designing and implementing policies for roads, levels of passenger transport services, and road safety (ibid.).

According to an insider perspective in the decade following the reforms, the main advantage of the changes was ‘accountability for actions taken, including safety’ (Dunlop, 1999, p. 60). The Land Transport Management Amendment Act of 2008 resulted in the merger of Transit New Zealand and Land Transport New Zealand, leading to the creation of the current New Zealand Transport Agency as a Crown Entity. This followed the ‘Next Steps Review of the Land Transport Sector’ conducted by the State Services Commission in 2007, which aimed to identify inefficiencies and other governance issues related to the provision of transport policy and infrastructure. The review highlighted several concerns within the transport sector, including:

- Not achieving value for money.
- Not fully delivering on the New Zealand Transport Strategy.
- Not fully delivering on the Government’s wider agenda, for example, economic transformation and sustainability.
- Not sufficiently responsive.
- Creating an ongoing fiscal risk for the Crown (Public Service Commission, 2007).

The Act sought to counteract the issues raised by the review through better integration between the different organisations. The three core functions of the new agency were:

- Investment – to manage the funding of the land transport system.
- Infrastructure – to manage the state highway system, including planning, funding, design, supervision, construction, and maintenance and operations.
- Regulation – to manage regulatory requirements for transport on land, including (albeit not limited to) maintaining and preserving records and documents concerning activities within the land transport system (consultancy report from MartinJenkins, 2019).

Or, as described by one of our respondents:

I guess very broadly NZTA has three main functions. It funds roading and the building of roads [...]. It manages the building of the state highway network in New Zealand [...]. And the sort of the regulatory and safety part of the transport system, so that's anything from motor vehicle registration, getting your WOFs [Warranty of Fitness] all the way through to sort of driver licensing things. So, the reason that NZTA came about was actually it brought those three functions into one organisation whereas previously it kind of split into different parts. (Senior HR Office, Waka Kotahi/NZTA)

According to our respondents, the integration of the re-amalgamated organisation never settled, and the organisation went through a rather comprehensive 'transformation' process, including a centralisation of many corporate functions in 2016/2017. Furthermore, all our sources claim that this attempt failed, resulting in severe retrenchment of the organisation while not actually succeeding in bringing together the different functions of the organisations. The losses affected particularly those working in regulatory functions ('frontline compliance roles').

Yeah, so the rationale was, and it was a sound rationale, was that we were still just legacy organisations shoved together into one and with a new name slapped on. But the integration was super lacking, there were lots of silos, people didn't understand each other across the business. (Manager HR, NZTA)

According to one of our respondents, the ambition to centralise the corporate functions failed as the different parts of the organisations built up their own corporate functions without any coordination.

[W]hat [the] transport planning and infrastructure side was doing, and what the regulatory side was doing was building up their own little like empire of corporate roles within their areas to deliver their stuff specifically. They didn't feel [...] they could get what they needed from the central corporate functions, and they weren't all kind of working effectively together ... (Manager HR, NZTA)

This issue was reiterated in later attempts to 'revitalise' the organisation in 2019, where the interim CE highlighted the need to stop 'team protectionism' (Ratcliffe, 6 August 2019, p. 6). Another notable observation from the same discussion was that the organisation's 'culture' played a significant role in the failed attempt to 'transform' it. Staff feedback pointed out that 'structure doesn't fix culture' and that 'culture beats strategy any day' (ibid., p. 3). More crucially, the regulatory functions were not prioritised and were viewed as 'low risk'. The new senior leadership lacked experience in regulatory matters and aimed to shift the organisation's focus away from what they perceived

as ‘a heavy compliance orientation’ (MartinJenkins, 2019, p. 27). Meanwhile, the consumer service side (e.g. safety, driver licences, and road construction) became the new priority for the organisation.

Our data, including interviews and various policy reviews, identifies this shift as the main reason for what would later be termed the agency’s ‘regulatory failures’. The most well-documented example of this is the 2019 warrant of fitness (WoF) incident in Dargaville, Northland. A person lost their life in an accident involving a vehicle with a frayed seatbelt that snapped due to corrosion. The vehicle had been issued a WoF the month before by an NZTA-approved mechanic. A subsequent inquiry led by Kirsty McDonald, QC, concluded that NZTA had failed to ensure the standards of the approved private operator were adequate (McDonald, 2019). Additionally, McDonald found that this incident was not isolated but part of a broader pattern of systemic issues related to the agency’s regulatory responsibilities. An independent inquiry by MartinJenkins further reinforces this, citing three main reasons for the failure:

The lack of effective oversight of the regulatory function dating from the formation of NZTA.

NZTA focusing specifically on customer service at a key point in its evolution, which over-shadowed focus on regulatory actions.

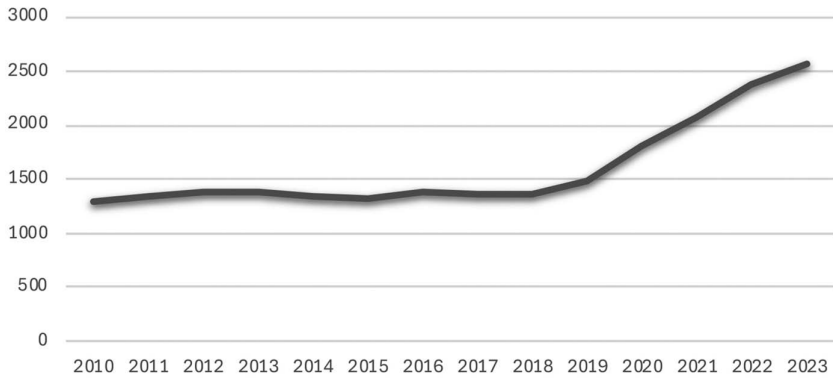
The inability to develop a single end-to-end regulatory strategy for the function until it was too late – developmental work on this was overtaken by the need for a concentrated focus on non-compliance issues. (MartinJenkins, 2019, pp. 23–24)

#### **4.1.2 The Rise of Organisational Professionals**

The number of FTE permanent employees increased by 99 per cent from 2010 to 2023 to 2,570. The agency is also characterised by a high voluntary turnover of staff, with an increase from 11 per cent to 18 per cent from 2021 to 2022 (Figure 4.1).

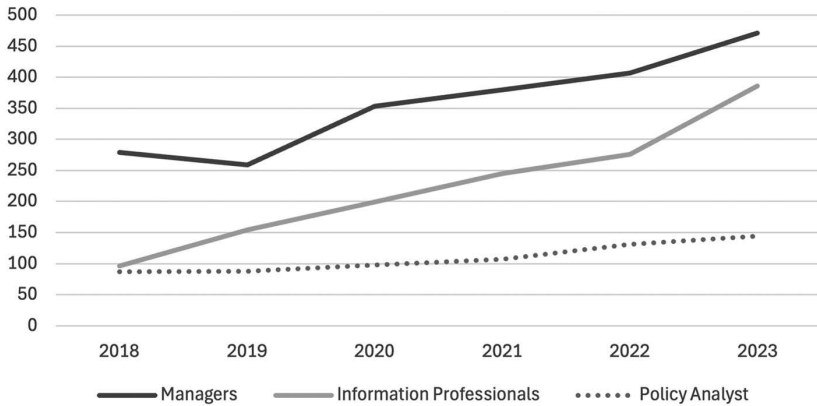
With respect to the public sector workforce data from NZTA, those groups that most resemble our organisational professional category seem to have increased significantly in recent years (Figure 4.2).

While the increase in managers (68 per cent) and policy analysts (65 per cent) is interesting, the increase in the composite occupational category of information professionals amounts to no less than 302 per cent, from 96 FTE in 2018 to a staggering number of 386 FTE in 2023 (Figure 4.3). This is during a period marked by a pandemic (Covid-19) and the country being close to an economic recession. This should be compared with the numbers from more traditional front-line workers.



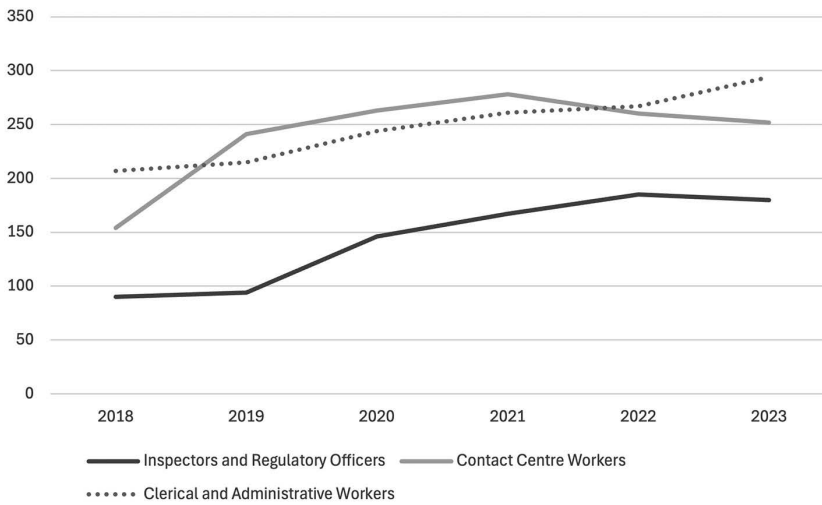
Source: Annual Reports 2010–2023.

Figure 4.1 Workforce changes as full-time equivalents in the Transport Agency 2010–2023



Source: Special request (the Official Information Act) from the Public Sector workforce data.

Figure 4.2 Organisational professionals in NZTA (FTEs) as reported by the agency to PSC



Source: Special request (Official Information Act) from the Public Sector workforce data.

Figure 4.3 Changes in traditional occupational groups in NZTA (FTEs) as reported by the agency to PSC

Although there has been an increase in the traditional occupational group of inspectors, this group is still small (and nowadays outnumbered by information professionals) given that they once represented one of the core functions of the organisation. Furthermore, the contractors’ and consultants’ headcounts and spending remained constant until 2013 but have mushroomed since.

NZTA has undergone a period of heavy restructuring in recent years. This took the form of a ‘botched’ initial restructure (in the words of one interview respondent), followed by a period of ‘turbulence’ during which retention of new staff dropped to almost 70 per cent. The executive was overhauled and (rounded) median tenure in the senior leadership team<sup>3</sup> dropped from seven years in 2015 to zero in 2019. The data show an expansion of ICT, communication, HR, and analysts in 2019. One of the interviewed representatives of NZTA opined that HR had similarly grown since 2019. However, this growth can also be explained by the lifting of the cap on staff within the public sector in 2019. While keeping the nominal number of staff balanced, NZTA, like many other agencies, used contractors at large.

<sup>3</sup> Based on the compiled biographies of senior leaders, drawn from annual reports, the data was calculated using rounded figures (to the nearest year).

... but obviously the work you do varies and big projects come along so all that happened was hundreds and hundreds of contractors were brought on board to a point where nobody in our organisation could probably even tell you how many there were. At the time there was no consistent way of identifying a contractor [...] to be perfectly honest, that's a pretty dodgy practice. But working in HR is always a bit of a challenge. But now we're certainly looking to reverse that and so you would see that you know if our FTE is now 2,000 plus and there's been a definite push to reduce those contract numbers so the two are definitely lining up there. (Interview, HR manager)

The quote probably best reflects that the real occupational changes have been hidden using contracted staff and consultants for many years. Furthermore, some of the dramatic changes witnessed in the figures above do not fully reflect reality within the agency. Meanwhile, it is pivotal to recall that the cap on staff did not discriminate between occupational categories but only operated with the public sector workforce per se. The more dramatic changes among information professionals and managers compared with inspectors show the difference in priorities.

### 4.1.3 Managerialism

As indicated above, the history from the 1980s onwards demonstrates waves of restructuring, with the various units involved in New Zealand land transport policy (and transport policy in general) being created, dismantled, carved out, merged, and absorbed. The land transport sector was at the heart of the managerialist reforms of the New Zealand public sector in the 1980s, as discussed above. This entails the separation between policy and service delivery, independent leadership with managerial discretion, privatisation of production units, separate governance boards, and the creation of (quasi) markets. A first illustrative example of managerialism in the NZTA case, which can also be linked to some of the challenges further down the line, is the emphasis on serving *customers*. In all fairness, this customer-driven focus was not just driven by the agency itself but was strongly endorsed by the national government and reflected in the 2018 Performance Improvement Framework review (State Service Commission, 2018). However, customers became synonymous with basically any external actors, including those commercial operators regulated by the agency.

The interest in adopting a customer service approach began in 2009/10, gained momentum over the next few years, and was particularly strong in 2013/14. Regulated parties were seen as customers to whom NZTA provided services that enabled the customers to willingly comply with their obligations for land transport safety. (MartinJenkins, 2019, p. 26)

Rather than overseeing and regulating private operators (such as auto mechanics checking the fitness of vehicles), the organisation's focus shifted to understanding and responding to customer needs. However, there was never a shared understanding of what 'customer' meant (Ratcliffe, 2019, p. 5). For some, it referred to the broader public or investment partners; for others, it meant internal customers, stakeholders, or even local governments. A decision document following the 2019 'revitalisation' of the agency highlighted that councils, peak bodies, and contractors are co-investors and suppliers, but none of these can be considered customers of the organisation. The only true customers in the equation are the broad public of New Zealanders. While this may seem like a semantic issue, it has significant implications for the organisation's purpose. Who exactly is NZTA serving?

A second prominent feature of NZTA was the extensive outsourcing of most operational functions to private contractors. This shift fundamentally changed the culture of the organisation and led to the emergence of a new organisational culture among the agency's workforce. As one of the HR officers interviewed within the agency expressed:

I guess when you start throwing a lot of contracts into the mix you know a contractor's not probably going to care too much about your organisational strategy and outcomes and the value you add to New Zealand, and they probably don't really care about being part of your team if they're just being brought in for a bespoke piece of work. (Senior HR Officer, NZTA)

And this change has not only affected the front-line and technical side of road works, but contractors have also been prevalent in the more strategic units of the agency, with a high number of contracted staff in more organisational positions. The National Party government's attempt to cut back on the public sector workforce with a cap on full-time workers in 2008 exacerbated this.

[S]o national [the National Party government] brought in the FTE caps and it didn't stop their hiring more staff it just meant that all our costs blew out because people just hired more contractors and consultants. And so, if you get into that mode then it's quite hard to pull yourself out of that. (Senior HR Officer, NZTA)

Finally, the changes over the years have resulted in a change of culture with more emphasis on private sector experience rather than the traditional recruitment of staff with a public sector background.

[S]o regulatory for example, they are both public and private, transport services exactly the same, HR exactly the same. There is this real focus on bringing that private sector experience in to the organisation because we are quite different to other government agencies [...] the person that I've just recruited in to my team as a leader is coming from the public sector because [...] they're coming from that

time of modern learning where that's you know our vision, that's where we want to go so this person needs to help us on that journey. (Learning and Development Leader, NZTA)

#### 4.1.4 Politicisation

Through the letters of expectations from various ministers to the board of the new transport agency, we can track the political demands. The result in our study is certainly more affected by a change of government in 2017, with the Labour Party coming into power with a different political agenda. However, the underlying rationale in these letters is distinguished by both continuity and change surpassing the electoral cycles. Several observations can be made.

First, there has been an expansion of both quantitative and qualitative expectations between 2008 and 2022. A simple, yet noticeable, change over the years is the length of the analysed letters. The first letter from 2008/2009 is just under four pages, while the 2021/2022 letter spans nine pages, with an additional four-page appendix. The qualitative expansion is evident in the increasing level of detail in the expectations outlined. Early letters from around 2008/2010 primarily outlined broad, concise expectations related to good governance, alignment with recognised audit principles and government policies, and engagement and collaboration with key stakeholders. In contrast, more recent letters include a much broader range of concerns, deliverables, interests, and relationships. To illustrate the contrast, the 2008/2009 letter is structured under only four headings:

- Value for money
- Governance
- Relationship management
- Land Transport Management Amendment Act 2008

This managerial approach is mirrored in some of the subsequent letters where, for example, the 2010 letter solely focuses on the financial aspects (or rather reduced funding of the agency). The language here conveys expectations around financial sustainability, value for money, control over (operational) costs, and quality and standard of services.

By contrast, the 2021/2022 letter contains a much longer list of expectations from the agency board, going beyond running some smooth operations. Furthermore, these expectations are presented as an *addition* to the already existing Government Policy Statement on Land Transport.

- Implementation of the Government Policy Statement on Land Transport
- Decarbonisation and environmental impacts

- Land transport funding
- New Zealand Upgrade Programme
- Road to Zero [Road safety]
- Regulatory capability and performance
- Rail
- Urban development
- Resilience and security
- Rapid Transit
- Freight connections
- Public transport
- Walking and cycling
- Innovation
- Organisational capability and performance
- Mana whenua [building partnerships with Māori]
- Good employment practices

There is an overall transition over the years from a more business-focused and managerial expectation to a ‘mainstreaming’ approach in which several political aims (of which some are only indirectly associated with transport) are expected to be fulfilled through the work of the agency. This concerns both sustainability, the Crown–Māori relationship, and to some extent also the role of transport in expanding existing communities and securing affordable accommodation. As an illustration of sustainability, this can be witnessed in the 2021/2022 letter:

The Agency’s [NZTA] focus should be to deliver investments and actions that reduce greenhouse emissions and reduce adverse effects on the local environment and public health. I [the Minister] expect embedding strong systems and approaches in the Agency to increase mode shift towards climate friendly transport will be a key part of this work. I would like Waka Kotahi to consider how it can support increased movements of freight by more climate friendly transport, such as rail and coastal shipping. (Ministry of Transport, [2007–2021], 2021)

A similar observation can be made in the same letter regarding the relationship with Māori.

Te Ao Māori [the Māori World<sup>4</sup>] plays a large part not just in defining who we are as a nation, but in setting us apart from the rest of the world. I acknowledge

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<sup>4</sup> To simplify the meaning of the concept, *Te Ao Māori* refers to the Māori language (*Te Reo*), the protocols and customs (*te Kitanga*), and *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* (the Treaty of Waitangi).

Waka Kotahi is on journey to embrace Te Ao Māori views. (Ministry of Transport, [2007–2021], 2021)

Notwithstanding the rather vague and aspirational language, these quotes stand in sharp contrast to the rather managerial ‘value for money’ discourse embedded in the early letters. Also, there is with respect to sustainability a gradual transition from ‘a neutral approach to transport infrastructure’ (as in the 2018/2019 letter) to more preferred forms of transportation (e.g. cycling and public transport). One HR manager from NZTA points out that there seems to be a pattern of fluctuation between different governments.

... you know your more National Right-wing governments tend to invest more in big road infrastructure, your sort of more Labour-Green tends to operate probably in [less] roading [and] more of an integrated [infrastructure] with cycling and public transport as well. (Interview, HR Manager, NZTA)

A second visible change is the redefinition of ‘governance’ over time. One of the first letters defines it in a ‘traditional’ and succinct way:

[Governance] include developing good strategic and medium-term business planning, ensuring appropriate board policies and processes are in place, and ensuring sound management practices are employed. (Ministry of Transport, [2007–2021], 2009)

Meanwhile, more recent letters have included long appendices with much more extensive and detailed instructions to the boards. In addition to the overall governance of the board, these instructions refer to both collective and individual duties of board members, alignment with overall government policy directions for agencies (such as employment relations and investment management), the relationship with the Ministry’s role as monitor, and the ‘no surprises’ approach (i.e. informing the Minister in time about arising risks). This also pertains to the amendment of the 2004 Crown Entities Act in 2013 and the subsequent ‘It Takes Three, Operating Expectations Framework’ (SSC, 2014) which stipulates the principles for making the ‘Crown entity system’ (i.e. the independent agencies) work well together through clarity about roles, control and responsibility, shared understanding and, not least, expectations. The term ‘expectation’ is a central concept that covers both formal requirements (such as these ministerial letters of expectations) and day-to-day expectations (Löfgren et al., 2018).

A third observation is that there is a certain continuity with respect to the regulatory functions and capabilities as mentioned above. This seems to have been on the various ministers’ radar ever since the genesis of the agency, and the regulatory failures which became visible much later were probably caused

by the internal culture of the agency rather than the lack of attention from the responsible ministers.

The letters show indirect elements of politicisation, although they are probably more tendentious testimonies of the waves and tides of the overarching policies of different governments. There are clear signs in the NZTA case that the government over time has been seeking to steer the investments and direction of the agency, and moreover to attain better control over the work of the agency. Unsurprisingly, the emphasis on control is also clearly an emphasis on securing accountability.

In addition to these letters, NZTA has first, and in line with the 2020 Public Service Act, tried to contribute to the strengthening of the Crown–Māori relationships through a Māori strategy. In addition to identifying values and principles, it also includes an action plan where one of the priorities is to ‘enhance performances, monitoring, evaluation, and accountabilities’ (NZTA, 2019) with respect to enhancing the delivery of the land transport system in line with *Te Ao Māori* (Māori world view) values. This was also reflected in the establishment of a Māori strategy team with new staff members.

I’ve got you know four different leaders reporting through me for their portfolios and practices and then I’ve got two sort of advisors that sit on that leadership team as well, so one of them is our Teo Māori advisors so learning across the whole centre of learning and development how we meet our obligations in terms of Māori capability. (Learning and Development Leader, Waka Kotahi/NZTA)

Second, the agency has at quite a late stage adopted strategies to combat climate change and become more engaged in reducing carbon emissions, establishing sustainability action plans in 2020 (*Tiakina te Taiao*). However, it is probably premature to identify any signs of whether this has impacted the staff composition (although this is likely). If we are to discuss a politicisation of NZTA, it mainly seems to come across as a response to all-government mainstreaming strategies, as depicted in the 2020 Public Service Act.

#### 4.1.5 Professionalisation

There are a few overlaps between the NZTA and STA cases in terms of professionalisation driving the changes in the workforce composition. Like the Swedish case, the agency has witnessed an increase in new staff with university degrees, and they are more likely to be generalists than specialists. These are not ‘married’ to the job, unlike previous generations.

... [they] joined the Ministry of Works as it was then as cadets out of school as 15- or 16-year-olds and [they] got their university degrees through that organisation, and then have you know stayed with it. (HR Manager, NZTA)

Even though the career stream for newly employed staff in general is fast within the agency, even junior administrative functions now require university degrees. Meanwhile, traditional clerical duties (the example provided by our respondents is 'data entry') have dropped. These are not necessarily the traditional agency staff with backgrounds in engineering and law, but also include more diverse backgrounds.

We're now getting people coming in with coms [communication] degrees or like that BA training or things like that who can kind of try out various areas. (HR advisor, NZTA)

Qualified, yeah that's the word, whereas now a lot of the people that come in to those sorts of jobs [...] In our team, [the] administrator, personal assistant type roles will be university graduates, and they will step out of those roles quite quickly but having learnt a great understanding of an organisation. (Interview, HR manager, NZTA)

A second factor mentioned by both our documents and our qualitative interviews is that both specialised technical skills and 'softer' skills (e.g. people management, public or *iwi* (tribe) engagement) matter. The traditional and specialised engineers are still critical for the planning and operational activities of the agency. Meanwhile, as a modern organisation, the agency cannot just rely on technical expertise, which does not always go hand in hand with, for example, managerial skills.

And look don't get me wrong not all technical leaders make terrible people leaders but what you kind of generally see is that technical people you know there's a reason that they're all very good at being what they are, that's the technical side they were passionate about it. (Interview HR manager, NZTA)

Finally, new professional groups with a focus on organisational matters (such as business analysts, HR, and policy advisers) have marched into the organisation holding a variety of job titles.

I'm just trying to think of an example, a business analyst role in our planning team which is in the corporate services area and then a business analyst that sits in the regulatory space might be called something completely different but what they do is pretty much the same, so it does change. (HR advisor, NZTA)

## 4.2 SWEDEN

### 4.2.1 Background

From around 1900, Sweden's transport infrastructure was gradually nationalised, with a particular focus on the railway system. By 1950, the Swedish

State Railways (*Statens Järnvägar*) employed no fewer than 50,000 people, making it the largest employer in the country at the time. The organisation was (almost) solely responsible for managing, operating, and regulating all aspects of railway transport. Similarly, the Swedish Road Administration (*Vägverket*), with around 14,000 employees in 1967, oversaw the entire production chain from planning to construction, as well as the maintenance of the road infrastructure. This structure helped foster a strong professional identity among engineers within the agency. At the same time, much of the workforce in both the road and railway sectors was made up of semi-skilled labour, including train drivers, conductors, construction workers, and navvies.

The State Railways was transformed from a government agency into a state-owned enterprise in 1988, with a focus on operational matters. Meanwhile, the responsibility for infrastructure maintenance and overall regulation was transferred to a newly established agency, the Railway Agency. In 2001, much of the remaining operational activities were outsourced (the deregulation of passenger transport began in 1993, followed by cargo transport in 1996). Over time, the maintenance of the infrastructure also became outsourced, and the Railway Agency was disbanded in 2011. Thus, within two decades, the Swedish railway system evolved from one of the most centralised in the world to one of the most deregulated.

Meanwhile, a wave of change swept through the Road Administration, largely driven by a new DG with a non-technical background. The traditional model of centrally organised road production was challenged by a shift towards a more customer-centric approach and a focus on public values. 'We started to look outside the organisation instead of being stuck to our internal plans,' as described by a former regional director in the Road Administration. Production and maintenance became exposed to competitive tendering, with both consultancies and construction companies being invited to bid. One of our interview sources actually mentioned that the changes in New Zealand had been the inspiration. Despite the overlaps between roads and railways, the higher degree of flexibility in the road sector resulted in even more far-reaching changes.

In 2011, the Railway Agency and the Road Administration were merged to form the Swedish Transport Administration (STA). This merger aimed to improve coordination and synergy between different modes of transport, both from a customer and sustainability perspective (government instruction 2008, p. 90, in SOU 2009, p. 31; interview with the investigator who proposed the merger). According to one of our respondents, the government sought to establish a more cohesive political direction for transport policy, with a smaller strategic policy unit while outsourcing operational tasks. However, the focus

on productivity and competition within operations was also central, as highlighted in the commission work that preceded the establishment of the new agency.

The market for constructive work is characterised by inadequate productivity and competition. The actions of the purchasers are important for a functioning market. The Swedish Road Administration and the Railway Agency are in their capacity as managers of the transportation infrastructures, dominant customers, and procurers in this market. Consequently, there is a demand for analysis on how these large procurement actors can secure an improvement in operations of the construction market and create conditions for innovation. (Government instruction quoted in SOU 2009, p. 31, appendix 1, pp. 9–10)

Thus, the merger was not a retreat from the marketisation trajectory. Instead, even more operations – most notably, planning – were to be driven by procured ‘innovative’ actors on the market. On the other hand, sustainability, availability, and customer focus also became more important for the politicians. STA translated and merged these partly contradictory ambitions into the role of strategic community developer (a ‘partner’ in societal development) and, subsequently, an innovation-promoting role as a ‘refined purchaser’ (*renodlad beställare*); these two roles became STA’s two dominating values during its inaugural years of existence (Swedish Transport Administration, 2015).

#### 4.2.2 The Rise of Organisational Professionals

What emerged from the 2011 merger was a smaller agency compared with its two predecessors, with the operational and production side – particularly the maintenance of infrastructure – being outsourced to private contractors. However, more advanced technical capabilities, such as those involving architects and infrastructure planners, were also significantly scaled down. This shift occurred because market actors were expected to assume responsibility for both the design and construction of infrastructure. Table 4.1 illustrates the differences in headcounts between the two agencies (The Road Administration and The Railway Agency) in 2008 and the newly established agency in 2012. These figures are sourced from The Swedish Agency for Government Employers, using their occupational categorisation.

While the falling off of the specific manual production work is significant after 2008, the reduction of all the groups except traffic management is clear. What is notable, however, not least with the ambition to retain a minor agency focused on procurement in mind, is the remarkable expansion of staff after 2012 (Table 4.2).

The increase in occupational roles within infrastructure planning suggests that the agency has not achieved its policy goal of adopting a ‘refined

*Table 4.1 Occupational changes following the merger between The Road Administration/The Railway Agency and The Swedish Transport Administration 2008–2012*

Type of position	Change	Percentage change
‘Social science’, law, inspection	1797→1369	–24
ICT and administration	2092→1655	–21
Infrastructure planning	3113→1430	–54
Traffic and transport management <sup>a</sup>	1498→1668	11
Manual production work	4919→214	–96
Redundancies/not categorised	926→323	–65
Total	14345→6659	–54

Note: <sup>a</sup> Mainly logistics.

*Table 4.2 Changes in the composition of staff in the Swedish Transport Administration 2012–2023*

Type of position	Change	Percentage change
Social science, law, inspection	1369→2534	85
ICT and administration	1655→2926	77
Infrastructure planning	1430→2866	100
Traffic and transport management	1668→2117	27
Redundancies/not-categorised	323→295	–9
Total	6659→10738	61

purchaser’ role (as discussed further below). The occupational category of ‘architects and planners’ (within infrastructure planning) dropped from 933 in 2008 (combining the two agencies) to 398 in 2012 but rose significantly to 1,092 by 2023. The group ‘production planning and management’ (also within infrastructure planning) saw an even larger decline from 1,094 in 2008 to 237 in 2012, though it rebounded to 608 in 2023 – still well below the 2008 figure, but nevertheless a substantial increase. Overall, the STA appears to have shifted back to a more traditional operational model, with its occupational capabilities reflecting a default position. While this might seem paradoxical, given that most services are now procured from private contractors, the market itself is well organised, characterised by close collaboration with the agency, which mirrors the market dynamics. To effectively determine what and how to purchase, the agency must align its internal expertise with the market players.

Many respondents emphasise the potential risks of knowledge gaps or even the loss of institutional knowledge.

Unless you got a computerised system, like the old Road Administration, which monitors every single detail down to the individual edge beams and the railings on the road bridges, you can't follow the process, you can't specify the contract. And this is where the new transport administration failed. They had to fold in the inspections of the infrastructure investments in order to enhance security. Also, to estimate the price of a contract, you need to know what it should look like. (Interview with former regional director of the Road Administration and government analyst)

Similar problems are cited in a large government commission report, significantly called 'Control over the facilities' (SOU, 2015:42), arguing the loss of institutional memory (specifically on the railway side). The consultation feedback from the State Railways and the Swedish Engineers advocated an ever-closer *collaboration* between purchasers and providers, despite principally being in favour of deregulation.

In terms of staff composition, the occupational category 'social scientists', legal officers, inspectors, ICT staff, and other administrative groups make up half of the total staff number, compared with less than a third prior to the establishment of the new agency. Compared with the previous situation with two separate agencies, these groups have grown significantly (despite the fact that the two historic agencies employed far more staff). While this tendency is observable in most Swedish government agencies, the case of STA also signifies an educational upgrading of the staff compared with the earlier situation. In STA, staff working with ICT represent the highest increase (102 per cent between 2012 and 2023). And yet, our qualitative interview data exhibit some frustration with the ICT unit in terms of meeting operational demands. Generally, the high levels of staff with either a social science, ICT, or administrative background indicate a stronger emphasis on organisational and governance capabilities. One additional task that creates bureaucracy is public procurement. What the government hoped would lead to innovation seems to have led to more administration, with the railway infrastructure maintenance becoming a particular pain point (Fröberg, 2024). In conclusion, the small procurement agency envisaged by the government has not materialised at all – on the contrary, the agency has been refilled with both new and traditional staff.

### 4.2.3 Managerialism

Shortly after the establishment of the new STA, the agency's management, including DG Gunnar Malm, presented a vision for the organisation (Swedish Transport Administration, 2015). One of the key strategic goals was for STA

to operate as a ‘refined purchaser’, managing the entire production chain and making procurement decisions that would foster innovation within the building and construction market. Another vision of STA as a ‘community developer’ was also outlined, describing a shift from the ‘technocratic’ twentieth century to a new era marked by broader societal negotiations (Swedish Transport Administration, 2015, p. 69). While the pamphlet may have served as a marketing tool for the new agency, its content reflects a sophisticated, even academic, level of communication. However, this expansive vision of driving societal change clashes with the more limited role of a refined purchaser.

Ek Österberg and Qvist (2020) highlight (through qualitative interviews) that the refined purchaser role faced immediate challenges. First, the procurement of the entire production chain (‘design-and-build contracts’ at fixed prices) proved too uncertain for the market, resulting in low interest and limited competition. Second, the building and construction market showed a preference for close cooperation with the agency, rather than free tendering – likely reflecting historical government–industry relationships (*ibid.*, p. 303). Third, the construction of infrastructure, particularly railways, is bound by rigid building standards that restrict the potential for innovation (*ibid.*). Together, these factors laid the groundwork for more organised relationships, which, according to Ek Österberg and Qvist (2020), have become the prevailing mode of operation.

First, the agency and potential suppliers have met regularly in an organised setting known as the Construction Forum, which primarily involves domestic players. Second, the actual tender processes have shifted towards close collaboration rather than competitive bidding. Trust has been a key element in this process, with the agency allegedly selecting vendors based more on reputation than on the bid itself. Third, close collaboration continues after the tender process through the deep involvement of project managers from the agency, creating a demand for experienced and skilled project managers. Our interviews support these findings and provide additional insight into what is considered ‘fair’ in terms of surpluses to the supplier:

What is the acceptable profit margin before Skanska [a global construction company] decides to take on a contract? Is it 7%? Ok, then we decide, we will make a 7% profit on this, this is our capital, now we are working, and we have these objectives we must achieve, and so we have control and open books, so I think, they must admit they need to make a profit, it is clear that they must make a profit, but we must need to gain as much as possible out of the investment. (Interview with retired manager at STA)

Hence, we may conclude that this is far from a refined market operation. Instead, the market is an organised and predictable arena for engagement between the agency and the vendors. This has naturally affected the organisational design and setting of the agency as these role descriptions require

different skill sets emphasising collaboration rather than the role of strategic purchaser. This also means a gradual withdrawal from the designated straight-forward professional roles ('the extremes' according to a development leader, interview) once envisioned by the government. One significant role for the STA is also to 'educate' this organised market.

Our contracts specify that they [the suppliers] should hire apprentices or trainees to enhance the future capability building [of the industry]. And we understand that the costs associated with these schemes are hived off to us. However, we perceive it as a future investment given the skill shortage in the industry. If we are going to construct these new [railway] mainlines, we need to make sure that the industry has got access to these capabilities. (Interview, HR manager at STA)

Obviously, this expands the role of HR management beyond the regular one where the capability and competence of the market are of crucial importance to the STA. Furthermore, staff from the supplier side may find themselves as future employees of the STA (according to the same manager, the average age of new staff is as high as 39 years). On the one hand, the agency seeks to mirror its environment; on the other, it is a unique actor (contracting services for about SEK 65 billion on an annual basis, making it one of the most market-influencing organisations in Sweden). This creates a demand for an organised market, close collaboration between the parties, and, with the vast sums of money being invested, closely monitored from the political side.

The other vision of the new STA entailed the role of 'community developer', including holistic solutions to infrastructure investments, local collaboration, sustainability, and accessibility for individual clients. Already in the 1990s, the Road Administration expanded its in-house competence to areas such as traffic security and accessibility for disabled citizens. More recently, this expansion of the policy domain has resumed with a significant rise of ICT specialists, geographers, landscape architects, and community planners. According to our interviewees, the community developer vision was crafted by an academic landscape architect who moved on to become the agency director of strategy (and for a short period also acting DG). During our interview, he explains that his vision was to alter the practice of planning towards a 'reflexive practitioner' in line with Donald Alan Schön (a professor in urban planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology). This entailed working with the 'location' and its possible future prospects in dialogue with the stakeholders of the location, with an overarching goal of securing accessibility in spatial planning (rather than emphasising the actual infrastructure). These ideas became influential and resulted in a programme for local and regional dialogues (still progressing). However, he also acknowledges that there is a high degree of uncertainty regarding whether his term changed any operational practices within the agency. First, there is an obvious tension between aiming for open

discussions with stakeholders about developing local areas and national (and transnational) demands for coherent national transport systems (where the latter obviously calls for standardised policies). Second, and perhaps more importantly, the local solutions also seem to adhere to standardised solutions.

It became a mantra, or a normative principle, that we should become a community developer. In my humble opinion, very little of that trickled down to the projects. What remained was this marketisation profile. We should purchase the suppliers' competence to do the job. We should take a step back, we should not try to control the consultants, but instead give space to creativity and competence, which turned out to be a challenge. The thoughts about community development caught some interest in the early stages of the planning processes, but not in the implementation of the projects. (Interview, development leader, STA)

Both this respondent and the former director of strategy strongly emphasise professional roles and educational backgrounds as a crucial factor. While the former director of strategy identifies his professional role as a landscape architect (and a reflective and communicative planning officer), the latter emphasises generic project management competencies with predefined standards.

Not even the initial projection phase sits with our part of the organisation, that is also being procured. What is left is a project management organisation and a procurement function with a high number of specialised procurement officers who plan and monitor the work of the consultants. [...] Our emphasis is on project management, portfolio monitoring, delivery controls and drafting the procurement documents. If you are operating with fixed prices, you need to specify your requirements at a very early phase. There's less flexibility for changes unlike when you are operating with the classical variable costs [...] Our work follows a couple of main processes divided into sub-processes where we follow the XLPM<sup>5</sup> model for project management which also is the model the STA is using. (Interview, development leader, STA)

According to Ek Österberg and Qvist (2020), a tightly modelled project management (XLPM) is also at the centre of the above-mentioned regional and local dialogues. Project management is thus the most prominent organisational professional role at the Swedish Transport Administration. This is confirmed in an interview-based study by Witzell (2019). What is primarily required is the ability to specify, procure and manage projects, as well as monitor and perform supplier quality control. Too much knowledge about physical planning can quickly inhibit the innovative ability of the market: 'Specific in-house know-how about physical planning, design and construction is seen as possibly counter-productive to market-driven innovation' (Witzell, 2019, p. 1422).

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<sup>5</sup> XLPM is a project management methodology (*Excellence in Project Management*) developed by the Swedish company Semcon.

Standardised project management (as a generic organisational professional competency) has undoubtedly made progress within the Swedish Transport Administration, although interviewees maintain that project managers with experience in physical planning still have much influence.

In summary, centralisation and hierarchical control are not as prominent at the Swedish Transport Administration as at the police (see Chapter 5). The historical professions have maintained their dominance, although management tries to balance this through more standardised project management methodologies. Above all, the agency is more characterised by horizontal than vertical relationships, between authority and market, where it must find a balance between marketisation and control, between political goals of sustainable development and an innovative market on the one hand, and the pursuit of predictability and vigilant monitoring on the other. Consequently, the STA seeks to mirror the market in terms of professional background and experience with revolving doors between state and market. In fact, another qualitative research study reflected that the research team often faced challenges discerning whether their respondent worked for the STA or for a consultancy, even if the interview was conducted in the Swedish Transport Administration's premises (Jacobsson & Sundström, 2017), which shows a resemblance to NZTA.

#### 4.2.4 Politicisation

The principal investigator in the government committee behind the establishment of the STA states in our interview that there was a clear ambition to create a more cohesive political direction for Swedish transport policy. Meanwhile, the designated role of a 'refined purchaser' seems to suggest a stronger degree of marketisation. This is not a paradox. The political direction since the early 2010s has been to increase productivity and innovation in the construction market (in the very first letters of instruction from the government, this was the main objective). To put it succinctly, *political aspirations* have always been driving the market reforms in this area, never the market itself. However, the classical question about who is accountable for what becomes a pressing issue in the new, fragmented organisational landscape. Whereas marketisation was the utmost goal at the time of the agency's genesis, the agenda shifted within a few years to highlight control and accountability. In the public commission report 2015:42 ('Control over the facilities'), STA was named and shamed for lacking basic knowledge about railway transports and being short on client competence. The political goals were in focus, while the formal control over the facilities was missing.

I can conclude that problems may occur with how to manage responsibility when diverse types of accountabilities and delegations interact, as well as with

interdependency between different entities within the organisation. (SOU, 2015:42, p. 20)

The creation of a politically controlled, yet innovative, market did not turn out to be simple, and Jacobsson and Sundström (2017) also emphasise that the STA took some steps back to a more traditional government agency role in the latter part of the 2010s. The term ‘partner’ disappeared from internal and external communication. The accountability issue, specifically regarding railway maintenance, still lingers on, though. For instance, the CEO of State Railways has called for an ‘executive committee’, with herself, cabinet ministers of finance and infrastructure, and the DG of STA to ‘resolve the problems’ (Fröberg, 2024).

However, a considerably more urgent control issue has been the extraordinary expenditures in transport. The Swedish Transport Administration’s procurement investments amount to SEK 65 billion per annum, and in addition to that, the planned intercity high-speed railway (although put on hold for the moment) is estimated to end up with a budget in the region of SEK 300 billion. These high expenditure costs were one of the chief arguments for establishing the agency. The principal investigator in the committee who set up the STA, expressed in our interview that there had been a suggestion to establish a policy unit in the Ministry of Industry and Trade with a mission of conducting more thorough cost–benefit analyses prior to any investments, but this never materialised.

The ambition of improving the political governance of the agency is also mentioned by our respondents. The specific political objectives in the letters of instruction from the government to STA increased from five in 2012 to a peak of 50 in 2020, after which it dropped to 42 in 2024. Like the development in New Zealand (see above), the political expectations of the transport agency cover a large scope of considerations such as regional development, sustainable urban planning, anti-drug policy, and gender mainstreaming. The large-scale investments, or ‘the mega-projects’ such as the high-speed railway system, are kept on a tight political leash. However, politics is also reactive with a short time horizon (Swedish National Audit Office, 2023).

My colleagues in the Government expected inputs from the Transport Administration as they never had the resources and time to develop anything more advanced given the constant barrage of enquiries from the political side [...] Much is driven by the single cases making its way to the agenda. Questions in Parliament, sudden crises, or just news stories. The recent discussion about [regulating] water scooters is a good example. (Interview with former regional director at the Road Administration and government analyst)

Elements of reactive governance in infrastructure policy have been highlighted from other countries (Kingdon, 2003). Delayed passenger train services, or motorists stuck in their cars due to blizzards, cause the strong opinion-based pressure that politicians find difficult to ignore.

A director at the STA also emphasises the reactive directing and even explicitly compares their conditions with the police. Internal activities run within the organisation through ‘task forces’ and ‘special operations’ rather than through coherent models of guiding frameworks. However, the respondent does not blame the government. In his view, this is the outcome of the fragmented and project-oriented character of the agency per se. The stronger bonds with the government are trustful, maintaining a clear and reciprocal understanding of their separate roles. The massive recruitment of social science graduates within the agency matches the occupational composition of the counterpart ministerial departments. According to our respondent, this has had an impact on the communication lines between the agency and ministry. Much of the previous communication from the STA was written by officials with a background in engineering and was often incomprehensible to the ministerial department.

Our stakeholders want us to describe our organisation, our strategies and how we spend the taxpayers’ money, in clear language. It’s clear that engineers and others with a technical background are not trained to accomplish that – unlike social science graduates. (Interview with planning manager at STA)

Thus, the capabilities of the agency do not only mirror the building and construction industry, but increasingly also competencies at governmental ministries.

The police and the STA are viewed as essential agencies by the government, a perception reflected in their increasing politicisation. However, there is some ambiguity in the politicisation of the STA. The government expects the agency to carry out high-profile infrastructure projects while simultaneously functioning as a market-driven organisation. While the government enforces a ‘no surprises’ policy, the agency is also expected to be creative and innovative. Both accessibility and sustainability are prioritised, but these goals are often incompatible. The large number of contractors and subcontractors further complicates these challenges. Additionally, during the early years of the agency’s operations, the DG was given clear instructions to streamline the agency, particularly its administrative functions (Jacobsson & Mujkic, 2016, p. 45). Contrary to these instructions, however, the result has been a growing bureaucracy, driven by the complex and often ambiguous demands placed on the agency.

#### 4.2.5 Professionalisation

Unsurprisingly, many traits of the old organisational cultures survived the merger between the pre-existing organisations. For instance, even if production, operations, and to some extent planning were outsourced, a strong engineering culture survived, as observed by one manager:

My boss, the head of the national planning unit at the STA, has just as much power as the DG. Yet, his previous achievements building bridges seems to matter more than his current role. He describes me as a ‘knowledgeable person – despite my legal background’. So even though most of the employees are not engineers, the engineering culture prevails within the organisation. (Interview with planning manager at STA)

This reinforces the horizontal nature of the STA in contrast to the police. The professional identity within the STA is strong and more closely tied to its stakeholders (e.g. engineers and project managers in the private sector) than it is within the police. Nonetheless, as mentioned earlier, there is an ongoing effort to recruit more general expertise in project management.

Increased politicisation has led to the agency’s growth. Far from the original vision of a small agency focused on procurement, the STA has expanded by 61 per cent over 12 years, despite the production side remaining outsourced to private contractors. All new hires are university graduates (according to an interview with the trade union president), which has significantly changed the staff composition. With the influx of organisational and professional expertise comes growing tensions regarding the agency’s core mission.

We’ve seen the emergence of a new organisational entity, which I refer to as the ‘administrative organisation’ [laughter]. Their professional role seems to be telling us how to do our jobs without ever delivering anything of value themselves. [...] I think we’re swimming in too much money. Five years ago, our annual turnover was around 50 billion, now it’s 73 billion, and next year it’s projected to be 90 billion. Our workforce has grown from 6,000 to 10,000. Frankly, I often say it’s easier to sit in your office and draft guidelines on how others should do their jobs. Every communications officer wants to become a coach, so now we have 200 communication officers all eager to tell others what to do. We have legal experts trying to tell others what to do, and HR sends me nine different recruitment templates. (Interview with manager at STA)

It is true that the agency harbours one of the largest communication departments in Sweden. It is also true that STA is one of the fastest-growing agencies in Sweden. With all these new resources, the agency builds an organisation that responds to many different role expectations: the rational planning agent of infrastructure, the partner and procurer in a market, the responsive authority

vis-à-vis the political direction, and, as signalled in the quotation, the creator of a modern, accountable organisation. Thus, the agency builds many accountability structures simultaneously, which run the risk of not satisfying anyone apart from the highly educated people who are provided with employment at STA.

### 4.3 COMPARATIVE DISCUSSION

The transport policies in Sweden and New Zealand, as well as the two national agencies, exhibit surprisingly similar trajectories. Both countries experienced a distinct move towards marketisation in the late 1980s, with most operative functions becoming privatised and/or outsourced, and the previously unified organisations being split into smaller units with distinct roles. One of the Swedish sources explicitly mentions being inspired by New Zealand's approach. The result of these reforms was a fragmented policy area with unclear responsibilities and a lack of accountability, which eventually led to the re-establishment of unified organisations (while the operative functions remained in private hands). Although the goal of these reforms was to reduce costs and staff, both agencies' workforces have grown remarkably over the years, with our categories of organisational professionals demonstrating the highest growth rates in the New Zealand public sector and among the highest in Sweden.

Our studies lead us to several comparative observations:

First, the outsourcing of operative functions has been accompanied by an increase in corporate functions, including procurement, communication, and other internal organisational matters. Furthermore, the 'modernisation' of the organisations has created new organisational layers. The substantial investments in infrastructure made by the agencies have also created a need for enhanced administrative and legal accountability.

Second, both transport agencies have faced stronger political pressure and expanded mission descriptions. Notably, the sustainability and climate change agendas have broadened the policy scopes of the two organisations, which in turn have influenced their accountability mechanisms.

Third, the increased focus on working with stakeholders and communities has resulted in a demand for more horizontal accountability mechanisms that protect the organisations from professional groupings, community interests, and private contractors. As a result, both agencies have experienced simultaneous marketisation, politicisation, and the growth of horizontal governance structures. In both cases, extensive use of consultants has blurred the boundaries between agency and market.

Fourth, these developments have led to significant staff growth in both cases (New Zealand saw a 99 per cent increase in staff from 2010 to 2023, while Sweden experienced a 61 per cent increase from 2012 to 2023). A notable feature in the Swedish case is that relationships with external partners are less market-driven than initially expected. The agencies are embedded in institutionalised and organised relationships with stakeholders rather than engaging in utility-seeking and transactional bargaining.

A slight variation between the two countries is the long period of a public sector worker cap in New Zealand, which has led to substantial use of contractors filling various roles within the organisation. Similarly, the increased recruitment of social science graduates for the STA reflects a desire to align with the expectations of political leaders, media, and other stakeholders holding the agency accountable. The dominance of professional engineers no longer meets the demands of a modern government organisation subject to both vertical and horizontal accountability mechanisms. This shift from engineering dominance can be observed in New Zealand as well, although we were not able to verify this shift in detail in the New Zealand example.

In conclusion, both cases clearly demonstrate that external factors – including increasing political control, marketisation, and other horizontal relationships – have contributed to the expansion of organisational professionalisation.

## 5. The police forces

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In sharp contrast to transport policy, policing or police science has, since the 1950s and 1960s, emerged as an interdisciplinary academic discipline with journals, conferences, bespoke research-based postgraduate degrees, and other forms of institutionalisation. It can be defined as: ‘... the scientific study of the police as an institution and policing as a process. As an applied discipline, it combines methods and subjects of other neighbouring disciplines with the field of policing’ (Jaschke et al., 2007, p. 23).

It combines elements from sociology, criminology, social policy, political science, law, history, and economics. While originally taking a critical and Marxist approach to the police as an instrument of (capitalist) power and the ‘militarisation’ of the force, it has gradually switched focus from grand theories to more policy-focused and evidence-based methodologies on police activities, organisation, and culture. While the adjacent area of *crime science* has developed in tandem with actual police work, police science is still detached from police practice. If one were to try to encapsulate the studies in one sentence, it would be the tension between police work being regulated by rules and laws while at the same time being tempered by the exercise of discretion by the individual police officer.

### 5.1 THE NEW ZEALAND POLICE

#### 5.1.1 Background

The history of policing in New Zealand follows the same pattern as in many other settler colonies. Six police officers in one of the first landing parties accompanied the first Governor, Lt Hobson, in 1840. The early lines of the force copied the organisation of the police in other parts of the British Empire (Ireland and New South Wales) and were just as much a militia as a police force. New Zealand received its first Constabulary Act in 1846, in which the initial paragraph says:

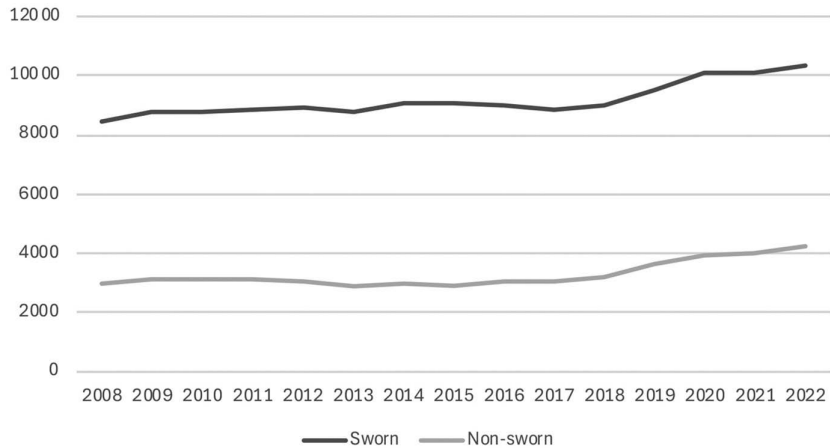
to cause a Power to Governor sufficient number of fit and able men to be ‘embodied to serve as an armed police force, who shall be sworn before a Justice of the Peace to act as constables in and throughout the Colony for preserving the peace, and

preventing robberies and other felonies, and apprehending offenders against the peace'. (The Constabulary Act, para. 1, 1846)

However, the role of preserving the peace became extended to engaging in open armed conflicts with the indigenous Māori population in what today is named the New Zealand (Land) Wars (1845–1872). This period is also characterised by the opening of the gold fields in 1861, where the massive invasion of 'untamed' cohorts of gold diggers led to the creation of local paramilitary police forces (in particular in the South Island) (Hill, 1989). The decentralised character of the police at the time is also a reflection of the attempts by the colonial government to create provinces (whereas the police as an organisation was first centralised in 1877, a year after the abandonment of the provinces). The Police Act 1886 split the police organisationally from the militia and laid the foundation for a national and civil police force. However, this formal divorce did not immediately alter the formal integral relationship between the military and the police. For several years, the force only recruited candidates who had done their service in the militia, and police officers remained armed (with revolvers) until the early twentieth century. The transition of the occupational culture from soldiers on a battlefield to civil preservers of the peace (and 'societal controllers') did not occur overnight. The period preceding the First World War is characterised by an incremental professionalisation (including entry exams) and aspirations to make the police independent of local political interests (in particular, local conflicts around alcohol licensing) (Hill, 1995). The serving police commissioner also banned the police workforce from joining the civil service association at its inauguration in 1890. However, this prohibition on membership was rescinded in 1893. Throughout the twentieth century, there has been an ongoing professionalisation of the personnel functions codified through police reforms in 1913, 1947, 1958, and 2008 (the last one described below). In addition to the above-mentioned legacy, these reforms brought with them the allowance of employee advocacy groups to represent members, providing for women to serve alongside male officers, and allowing for serving civilian staff to be employed by the Commissioner as non-sworn members of police (which first happened in 1989). During this period, the police witnessed a massive influx of non-sworn staff from 700 in the 1980s to 1,900 staff in 1997 (Morley, 2000, p. 65).

### **5.1.2 The Rise of Organisational Professionals**

The police represents a traditionally conservative organisation where senior officers 'earn' their positions through dedicated service. As already indicated, there is a classical, and rather crude, distinction between sworn (constabulary) and non-sworn staff within the police. Figure 5.1 provides a general overview.



Source: New Zealand Police (2024), annual reports.

*Figure 5.1 Changes in the New Zealand police force 2008–2022*

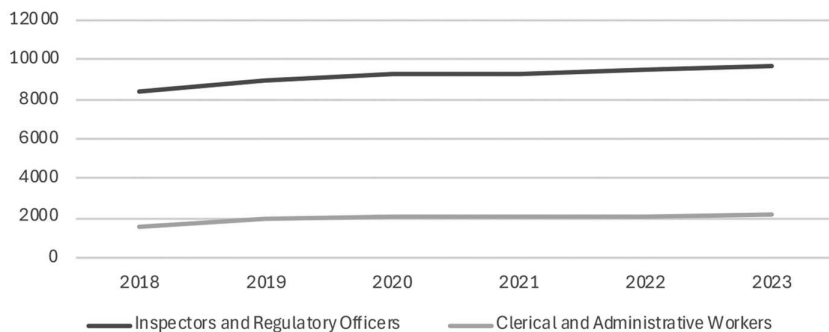
The constabulary’s exceptionally high tenure seems to trickle over into the non-sworn (civilian) side. Professional (i.e. civilian) staff typically serve for almost ten years (among senior leaders, the average was 14.6 years in 2020). A more granular way of looking at the more recent numbers is to use the Public Sector Workforce Data. Figure 5.2 shows the changes in the uniformed police force (‘inspectors and regulators’) and traditional administrative support.

Police boast a ‘lean’ back office, claiming that many ‘back-office staff’ are actually in ‘frontline support’ roles, including contact centre staff and radio dispatchers, and that the ‘true’ back-office numbers only 600–700 people in an organisation of 13,500 (according to an interview in 2020). However, the official back office/frontline ratio rose steadily from 19.6 per cent in 2000 to 26.1 per cent in 2009 before plateauing, rising again slightly in 2018. As pointed out by one of our interview respondents from the police: ‘the (back-office) work needs to be done though, and government cyclically tries to increase the proportion of sworn staff; then coppers are brought in to fill back-office gaps, and then the government says why aren’t they on the street, and more civilian staff are employed’ (interview, representative from the Police Association).

If we turn to organisational professionals, we can, in more recent years, see a distinctly sharper increase of certain groups, as reflected in Figure 5.3.

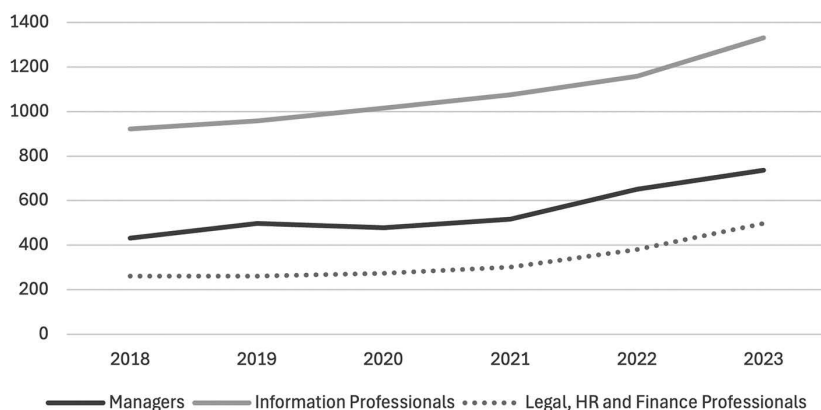
The trajectory for the organisational professionals is showing a sharper increase for information professionals (44 per cent), with managers, legal, HR, and finance professionals not far behind. One can discuss whether recent

dramatic events (such as the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020–2021) have accentuated this increase in administrative support functions, where the police took on a number of lockdown- and quarantine-related patrol functions. However, it is notable that the curve has continued upwards following the lifting of many of the pandemic-related measures, with an increase considerably higher in the last measured year (2023).



Source: Special request (Official Information Act) Public Service workforce data 2018–2023.

Figure 5.2 ‘Traditional’ occupational groups in the New Zealand police force



Source: Special request (Official Information Act) Public Service Workforce.

Figure 5.3 Organisational professionals in the New Zealand police force 2018–2023

### 5.1.3 Managerialism

One distinctive feature of the police until the early 2000s was the absence of a constitutional position in the legislation, with the police enjoying full operational independence. Unlike other parts of the public sector, the New Zealand police were placed outside the public sector framework following reforms in the 1980s (referred to as ‘police exceptionalism’). The ambiguous wording that the Police Commissioner was appointed by and served ‘at the pleasure’ of the Governor-General further reinforced this separation. The 1988 State Sector Act explicitly excluded the police from the list of state services, effectively making it ‘an instrument of the Crown’. This left the police organisation largely unchanged.

However, from the 1980s onward, there was growing pressure for the police to become more accountable for their use of public funds and to deliver more focused and effective services (den Heyer, 2016). The push for a more service-oriented approach is reflected in a series of strategic plans for change management, including ‘Policing 2000’ (New Zealand Police, 1996), ‘Policing Excellence’ (New Zealand Police, 2010), and ‘Prevention First’ (New Zealand Police, 2017). All these initiatives adopted modern strategic approaches from the private sector with the aim of enhancing police efficiency and effectiveness, as well as modernising the organisation.

A significant event that, according to some interview respondents, triggered subsequent reforms was the failure of the Integrated National Crime Investigation System (INCIS) computer system. After a \$100 million investment and a contract signed with IBM in 1994, the project was abandoned in 1999. An analysis of the project revealed that the police lacked the capacity to fully grasp the complexities of such a large IT initiative. Furthermore, the semi-military structure of the police force proved to be a poor fit for managing the partnership with the private sector vendor. As one of our respondents, who was closely involved in the INCIS project, expressed:

Also, part of it is just a need for expertise. I ran the IT section. I couldn’t do that with just sworn officers. They just didn’t have the expertise. They didn’t happen to have developed any infrastructure architects you know. [...] But I think after INCIS a lot of that just disappeared. Because we actually reached the conclusion that we just can’t afford to have this. We need to work out what’s sensible for which part of this business. And use the right people to do the right things. (Interview, former Police Commissioner)

Over the years leading up to the new Police Act (2008), the exceptionalism of the police force and the legacy of the formative years were addressed in various reviews and management programmes. For example, in the Police Act Review from 2006 (Police Act Review, 2006, p. 2):

A divide between sworn and non-sworn staff members that inhibits organisational cohesiveness, limits flexible opportunities for career development between the two categories, and limits deployment options.

A quasi-military disciplinary system that does not cater for performance management, nor reflect modern employment practice.

An arbitration model that reflects a style of industrial management last seen in New Zealand around 20 years ago.

The review declares that ‘there seems to be no compelling arguments why standard rights and obligations applying to other state sector employees should not also apply to the Police workforce’ (ibid., p. 7). Although there may be reasons to preserve certain provisions of the office of constable, all police staff should be subject to general employment for state services.

The first challenge was particularly pronounced as it both limited the possibilities of recruitment and retention of more specialised roles, but also prevented modern career progression within the force. Sworn police officers were those officers who had taken a statutory oath of office, thereby being granted the powers of a constable, while non-sworn ‘civilians’ were excluded from certain functions and roles. One of our respondents recalls how things have changed.

When I first started like the head of HR was a cop. You know theoretically if one was good enough, they could apply for the job when it came up. But yeah, it would be weird for that to be the case now. (Senior HR office, the Police)

The review lists how this dichotomous staffing model caused several constraints in practice, including recruiting technical specialists for more sophisticated crime investigations (e.g. cybercrime and forensic investigations), and was also mentioned in our interviews.

[One of the main decisions were the] moving of some tasks to [non-sworn] staff rather than sworn officers. That was just common sense. That you don’t need to be able to run, swim, shoot, drive cars at speed for many of the tasks of policing. And it’s just silly to require a person to have all those skills. Then put them behind a desk to fill out forms. You know it just doesn’t make sense. Also, part of it is just a need for expertise. I ran the IT section. I couldn’t do that with just sworn officers. They just didn’t have the expertise. (Interview, former Police Commissioner)

The 2008 Police Act captures these issues, and perhaps more importantly, also emphasises the responsibility and accountability chains of the Police Services (name changed from Force). First, the relationship between the highest in command, the Police Commissioner, and the responsible Minister was, in many ways not clear in the existing legislation, with the former holding much

discretion on how to enforce the law. However, the law proposal did underscore that the police were also tied to accountability in other respects.

Police is subject to further multiple and overlapping accountabilities; both formal legal accountabilities, but just as importantly, in the sense of Police and the Commissioner being answerable to the New Zealand public (often expressed through the media). (New Zealand Police, 2008, p. 10)

Analogous to the development of the political accountability chains, there is also an appearance of independent bodies for inquiries into police misconduct. Despite some resistance from the force to change the existing system of internal disciplinary procedures, there is from 1988 (with the instigation of the New Zealand Police Complaints Authority (PCA)), a movement towards an independent and external body to lead investigations into police misconduct. This culminated in 2007 with the establishment of the Independent Police Conduct Authority (IPCA) (Buttle and Deckert, 2017).

Another recent example of managerialism was the introduction of the inter-agency scheme 'Better Public Services' in 2012 that also affected the police. Following the global financial crisis, the New Zealand Cabinet identified 10 'result areas' with measurable targets that were to be achieved within a five-year period and which were to be monitored and reported on a regular basis (Scott & Bardach, 2019). The police was a key agency for the achievement of Result 7 (reducing total crime, reducing violent crime, and reducing youth crime). It also had a significant role to play in other result areas including Result Area 4: reducing assaults on children, Result Area 8: reducing reoffending, and Result Area 10: New Zealanders being able to complete their transactions with government easily in a digital environment.

Finally, the growing emphasis on accountability is pronounced in the 2008 Act and in other sources. Part of this pertained to the lack of mechanisms for securing and monitoring the performance of individual police officers. The existing performance system was based on disciplinary hearings in cases of gross misconduct rather than just poor performance.

The current police disciplinary system for sworn staff is cumbersome, time-consuming, and outdated. It needs to be replaced with a modern approach to managing misconduct and poor performance, based upon a Code of Conduct, applying standard employment law and best practice human resource management principles. (Bazley, 2007, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Police Conduct*, p. 2)

### **5.1.4 Politicisation**

In tandem with the 'normalisation' relationship between the responsible Minister and the highest administrative leader of the police (i.e. the

Commissioner), bringing it in line with other public sector organisations, certain events have over the years also affected the values of the force. Whilst the broader reforms in the machinery of government left the police organisation unchanged, other events in the 1980s and 1990s triggered a gradual political redefinition of the principles and values of the force. First, the 1981 New Zealand tour of the national South African rugby team ('the Springboks') caused the largest civil unrest in the country's history. More than 150,000 participants in 200 demonstrations, and no less than 1,500 charges against the protestors generated polarisation and tensions between conflicting groups in society. Some historians even claim that it affected the self-identity of the country. There had been a growth of protests involving any sports collaboration with the racist apartheid regime in South Africa up through the 1970s (particularly since the South African rules excluded any participation of Māori players on the New Zealand rugby team, the 'All Blacks'<sup>1</sup>) which came to a culmination in the 1980s. Although the country had witnessed episodes of violent civil unrest in the past (e.g. the Great Strike in 1913 and the 1951 Waterfront Dispute in Wellington), the demonstrations during the Springbok tour confronted the police with a resourceful and vocal middle class, as described by one of our respondents.

One was the Springbok Tour, which really did change the Police's relationship with the next generation of middle class. I would say educated New Zealanders because they were generally the people who were opposed to the tour, and who went and marched. It was the nearest thing New Zealand had to a civil war. (Interview with former senior in the Police Association)

Another respondent highlighted that the police rarely interacted with most law-abiding, middle-class citizens, and therefore, when faced with demonstrators, they often responded with the same violent tactics typically reserved for their 'normal' clientele – criminals and socially marginalised groups. For the first time, the police deployed special riot squads to engage with the demonstrators in an extremely violent and heavy-handed manner, leading to injuries. Although there were no fatalities and most of the tour proceeded as planned, this event is often cited as a low point in the country's history. It marked a turning point where the police began to reassess their operations and consider their accountability to the public. As one respondent put it, cabinet ministers in later governments 'cut their political teeth on the Springbok tour', which had a lasting impact on their attitudes toward the police. This issue resurfaced during the unrest following the Covid-19 anti-vaccination convoy that occupied the

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<sup>1</sup> In 1970, the South African authorities allowed Māori players to participate but invited and labelled them as 'honorary' whites.

parliamentary grounds in early 2022, where the police were forced to balance political pressures with their traditional law enforcement role.

A second value-based challenge for the police involves their relationship with Māori communities. As previously mentioned, the predecessors of the modern police force were involved in the New Zealand Land Wars in the nineteenth century, as well as the subsequent land confiscations and forced evictions of Māori communities. Some commentators argue that this historical legacy has contributed to the current distrust of the Police in Māori communities, with continued clashes and the persistence of institutional racism within the force (Te Whaiti and Roguski, 1998). Since the revival of the Treaty of Waitangi as a key component of constitutional conventions in the 1970s, the police have increasingly focused on improving their relationships with Māori and boosting Māori representation within the force. Despite significant recruitment efforts over the years, Māori still make up only 12.3 per cent of the workforce (lower than the share of the population), while Pacific Islanders represent 6.8 per cent and Asians 6 per cent (New Zealand Police, 2024).

### **5.1.5 Professionalisation**

As shown above, the number of non-sworn police personnel has grown in recent years, though perhaps not as significantly as in other areas of the public service. However, the case of the New Zealand police presents a somewhat unique and isolated organisational history. Unlike other parts of the civil service, the organisation (and by extension, its workforce) was not significantly impacted by the reforms in government machinery during the 1980s and 1990s. It has only gradually aligned with the broader public sector, partly in response to external criticism.

[S]o you have people who come up through Police who have been in the organisation forty-five years or something, you know, but they've only ever known Police, and they've only ever known the way Police work. So, they don't really get exposure to the fact that there are other ways of doing things, and that some of those ways might be quite successful and applicable to Police, so that to me was kind of like the first chink I suppose in the armour. (HR Officer, the police)

Well because when I went there [the Police] it had [been] so much criticism about policing. Because we had been criticised so regularly. Policing wasn't in a good space you know. "You [The Police] don't know how to manage your money. You don't know how to manage your people. You don't know how to manage your technology. You might be okay at policing but we're not sure." I mean everything was in question at that point. So, we had all the worst outcomes of accountability. In terms of an organisation so the organisation had closed in on itself. And had started to become fortress policing. (Former Deputy Police Commissioner)

Both our interview material and reviews over the past 20 years point to several reasons that largely align with the themes of managerialism and politicisation discussed above. First, there is the functional argument that modern policing requires skills and capabilities ('professionalism') that go beyond the traditional skillset of sworn police officers. This rationale was a key factor behind the new Act in 2008. It is especially relevant with the rollout of various IT systems and the growing prevalence of online crime. Additionally, it pertains to the gradual hiring of professional staff for HR functions. While some interview accounts express critical views about this development, they also suggest that this growth, although notable, is still not a major factor.

So, in very broad terms, I think our true back office if you look at ICT, HR, finance, is probably 600–700 people, [the] true frontline is about 5,000–6,000 and everyone is somewhere between those. [...] I very rarely use the phrase frontline because it is just, it's so hard to define and how you define it means you know, but if you just look at the ones who will, you might see if you wander down the street, in a Police car dealing with calls for service, there's about 4,000–5,000 people in that. The true back office is pretty small, and mostly in sort of ICT and training are our big back-office functions, and you know if you look at you know, strategy, HR and finance it's 300–400 people all up [...] which out of an organisation of 14,000 is pretty tight. (Head of HR, the police)

It should be noted, though, that this interview was conducted at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic and does not correspond to the more recent occupational changes presented above.

Another important element of the 2008 Police Act was the substantial changes to employment policies. In preparation for the Act, the police commissioned an 'issue paper' in 2006, focusing on specific HR-related topics and identifying both challenges and potential solutions. In its introduction, the paper adopts an unusually candid tone, stating that the 'inner workings of HR' within the police had historically been characterised by the layering of various, often contradictory, elements. For example, as one of our respondents described, the typical administrative 'backroom' staff at police stations consisted of 'older' or 'infirm' officers who were essentially waiting to reach retirement age. With the new Act, these officers could now leave with 'dignity' and full superannuation entitlements. This shift also paved the way for filling administrative roles in the back offices with non-sworn 'civilians' possessing professional skills.

## 5.2 THE SWEDISH POLICE

### 5.2.1 Background

In line with other European countries, the modern Swedish police force emerged from a long history of decentralised arrangements. Towns and parishes (later municipalities) appointed their own constables, operating under the supervision of the County Boards and their Governors. These arrangements persisted until the nineteenth century. Drawing inspiration from the Peel reforms in England in the mid-nineteenth century, a professional organisation of constabularies was established, starting in the major cities of Stockholm and Gothenburg. However, in most of the country, the old system remained in place, with local county administrators (*länsman*) fulfilling multiple roles as police chiefs, tax officials, and lower-level prosecutors, supported by part-time officers (*fjärdingsmän*).

An important factor driving changes in the 1800s was the recurrent confrontations with demonstrators, where military responses had proven too forceful (Nyzell, 2014). This led to the militarisation of the police, with constables recruited from the ranks of non-commissioned military officers, and the introduction of weapons, initially sabres and later firearms. The 1925 Police Act marked a shift towards greater coordination of national operations, including the introduction of a national uniform, though local responsibility remained with municipal advisory citizens' boards (Lord, 1998).

In 1954, local police forces were merged into a national police force, and nationalisation of training programmes streamlined the process. This trend continued with the Police Reform Act of 1965, which created a fully national police force with standardised recruitment and training to meet the demands for specialisation and coordination. Local government bodies could no longer manage the rapidly increasing crime rates and traffic accidents resulting from the rise in private car ownership (*ibid.*). The Swedish National Police Board was established as a national authority, while operational autonomy remained with the 21 police districts. The national agencies – the National Criminal Police, the National Swedish Laboratory of Forensic Science, and the Swedish Security Service – were all subordinated to the National Police Board.

Operational independence continued to rest with local police commissioners, but they could now draw on national resources. In line with a broader trend of centralising government authorities during the 1990s and 2000s – affecting institutions such as the Defence Forces, Customs, the Tax Agency, and the Social Insurance Agency – the police force was restructured and unified in 2015. Although the organisation is still regionally based, the number of regions was reduced to seven, and regional commissioners now report directly

to the National Police Commissioner. At the same time, the Security Service was removed from the remit of the police and became an independent agency. This reform also led to the centralisation of corporate support functions, such as HR, communications, financial management, and IT. Even support staff working in the regions are now expected to report directly to the heads of their respective functions in Stockholm. Formally, the Swedish police is now a hybrid organisation, incorporating elements of both matrix and hierarchical structures.

### 5.2.2 The Rise of Organisational Professionals

Contrary to the historical tradition of a decentralised organisation, and a legislation that provides the individual police officer with a strong mandate to use her or his discretion and judgement, centralisation has certainly been the dominant trend since the 1990s. This is most visible in the administrative layers at the central level. The workforce data before the 2015 reform clearly shows this (Table 5.1).

Making comparisons with developments post-reform in 2015 is challenging due to the significant restructuring. For example, central operational units, such as the National Operations Department (NOA), have expanded in response to emerging crime types, including cybercrime and transnational crimes. Additionally, HR has taken on the responsibility for the Police College, which is now spread across five different universities and university colleges.

Between the 2015 reform and 2022, the central level of the police force grew by 35 per cent in terms of FTEs. From representing just 4 per cent of the total workforce in 2000, the central level accounted for 19 per cent in 2022 (based on annual reports). This expansion has largely occurred on the non-sworn side of the force, which witnessed an increase of 40 per cent between 2015 and 2023. In 2023, civil staff represented 69 per cent of the central level. However, regional districts also experienced an expansion in non-sworn staff, with a 62 per cent growth between 2015 and 2023. Meanwhile, the traditional group of sworn police constables grew by only 8 per cent during the same period, with even less growth among patrolling constables, according to the Police

*Table 5.1 Workforce changes in the Swedish police force 2000–2014*

FTE	2000	2014	Increase (%)
The National Police Board	764	1,615	111
The Police Districts	20,982	26,042	24

*Source:* The Swedish National Police Board Annual Reports.

Association (*Polistidningen*, 3 September 2020, <https://polistidningen.se/2020/09/hon-vill-se-fler-kollegor-ute/>), despite strong political pressure to increase the number of police officers. The lowest growth was observed among community police officers (The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, 2023).

These drastic changes in the composition of the police workforce are explained in our interviews by a general shortage of sworn officers, particularly crime investigators (interview with the president of the Police Association). This is further supported by data from the Swedish Agency for Government Employers (2023), which shows a doubling of crime investigation staff between 2015 and 2022. Some have questioned whether traditional sworn police training is necessary to conduct modern police work, especially at the national level, where competence, knowledge, and analytical skills are increasingly valued over the traditional sworn officer path.

It is difficult to accurately determine the growth of organisational professionals within the police force since the 2015 reform, as some of this growth predates the reform. However, what we can observe is that HR has experienced the highest growth – 55 per cent – between 2015 and 2022 (although this group also includes all teachers and instructors within the police force). The central communication division now comprises 186 FTEs, making it one of the largest communication units in Sweden.

However, this shift in workforce composition should not be solely equated with bureaucratisation. As mentioned earlier, the primary driver appears to be the shortage of trained officers. To make use of the allocated budget, civilians were employed in place of trained police officers. As noted in a report: ‘There is a perfect correlation between increased budget allocations and staff growth in the regional police forces’ (Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, 2023, p. 45). Nonetheless, the long-term trend undeniably points towards bureaucratisation. The relatively modest growth of community police officers, compared with the massive increase in non-sworn civilians, along with the continuous expansion at the central level, indicates that the issue extends beyond simply a lack of uniformed constables. An evaluation by the Swedish Agency for Public Management shows that while the reform had positive effects on the strategic and governance aspects, it is difficult to identify any positive results in terms of solving or preventing crime (SAPM, 2018).

### **5.2.3 Managerialism**

During our interviews, some of our respondents explained that the centralisation of the police can be traced back to NPM and the financial crisis in the 1990s.

This frantic measuring started in the 1990s with predefined targets for breathalyser tests and traffic fines. The transport police were leading the way. [...] What matters is not the preliminary investigation, but the recording per se. We ticked the box. (Interview, Senior Police Commissioner)

It should be emphasised that NPM is never explicitly defined by the respondents, though it is clear they are referring to control (costs), governance, and performance measures – factors that were rolled out across the public sector, including the police, during the 1990s (Ivarsson Westerberg & Nordström, 2019). This focus on ‘quantifying’ became notorious for its unintended consequences, with the quantitative target of breathalysing a fixed number of drivers being the most infamous example. To meet the target, the police set up controls in areas where they were least likely to catch drivers exceeding the legal limit. While these performance objectives were initially introduced with a balanced budget in mind, they quickly became a politicised tool in the broader war on crime.

A former district commissioner in our interview noted that there have always been turf battles over resource allocation within the police organisation, particularly between local and regional levels. However, from the 1990s onward, a shift in attitude became evident at the central levels. Even though the changing circumstances did not alter the reactive and contingent nature of police work, it became increasingly clear that resources were not infinite.

Prior to 1965 the national police force was a central resource ready to be deployed wherever it was needed. Today there is no spare capacity, so you need to choose what to prioritise, just like in the health care system. (Interview, former Regional Commissioner)

The shortage of spare capacity and limited resources has created a situation where even smaller events trigger ‘special operations’ mechanisms and other forms of extraordinary responses. However, according to the same respondent, more serious is that the organisational and governance focus in the 2015 reforms undermined the individual responsibility of the police officer.

The central legal sources – The Police Act and the Code of Judicial Procedure – both contain wordings such as ‘Police Officer may apprehend’. ‘Police Officer may use armed force’ etc. The individual police officer has been bestowed this through a parliamentary act. There are only a few instances where the legislation mentions the Police organisation. There is a duality between the agency as a decision-maker, and the individual officer as the same [...] This is the law of the land, and not just something an agency head can relitigate. The government can’t change this practice unless they want to change the legislation as such. These New Public Management crazes have intruded in structures they don’t understand. You are cutting up neural pathways. (Interview, former Regional Commissioner)

However, the managerial aspirations predate the 2015 reform. An Auditor-General report from 2005 criticises the National Police Board for not having implemented a performance management system (Swedish National Audit Office, 2005). It is noticeable that the legal aspects of police operations are ignored in the report. While these are mentioned in the green papers from the Ministry of Justice leading up to the reform which created the centralised organisation, they are not directly aligned with any managerial aspects (SOU 2012:13). Our qualitative interviews with key respondents address many critical remarks regarding the centralisation of the Police, and in particular the corporate support functions (including HR).

As regional commissioners, we are disappointed being stripped off the responsibility for our administrative support functions such as HR, finance, communication, IT, and development. Finance and HR represent the two most essential functions for any Police commission. I used to have a word with the trade unions when we discussed controversial recruitments. This is no longer the case. Instead, I'm being told off by some 32-year-old graduate in human relations that I don't have any authority. And I end up being called in for a meeting with the top brass and being disciplined like a schoolboy. (Interview, former Regional Commissioner)

This quote, which mirrors other testimonies, demonstrates the turf between traditional, operative, and contingent practice within the police force, and the organisational professional roles that have grown stronger through centralisation. Another example picked from the academic literature (Eklund & Landström, 2019) shows how a Police Commissioner in the northern part of the country was not allowed by the HR department to run a snow scooter training course during the winter months. Instead, they approved the course to run during the spring (which rendered it useless). The outcome of the reform in 2015, according to our respondents, is a sluggish organisation blocking pragmatic and devolved decisions.

The old hierarchical model was simple. The person in charge made the decision. The new model is inert. We and the [support functions] are co-existing on different timelines. (Interview, Police Inspector)

Unlike similar attempts to centralise support functions in the Swedish central government, the police reform in 2015 has not gone unnoticed. The overall argument has been that the restructuring was managed by people who lacked any understanding of what police work entails. Existing teams were broken up, and staff were 'folded in' through arbitrarily constructed spreadsheets. As described by a middle-range Police Inspector:

They established loads of working groups. And it quickly became clear to everyone that these external consultants didn't understand police work. I asked a few

questions, and the response was “I don’t know. I’ve never worked with the Police before”. [...] Anyway, the new teams were all coded according to eight digit/letter codes which made it impossible to identify the location and role of the team. This model was rolled out across the country regardless of the geographical context. And then they began to juxtapose the different teams. Whether HR, District Commissioner, we were all treated the same. And on top of everything, they advertised all the managerial roles and made us apply for our own jobs. So many managers were replaced causing uncertainty not just among the managers, but for everyone within the organisation. (Interview, Police Inspector)

The underlying narrative is that what is considered ‘real police work’ clashes with new ideas based on the premise of generic organisations.

#### 5.2.4 Politicisation

One factor in the ambitions to centralise the Swedish police has been to enhance political control through more detailed appropriation directions (and letters) from the government to the organisation. As a former regional commissioner expresses it:

When I was Director General for The Prison and Probation Service, the responsible Minister asked me why I hadn’t asked for any missions. Agency heads need to have missions and politicians only want to allocate missions.

Another former regional commissioner who was involved in the 2015 reform claims that there is no doubt that the reform entailed a clear ambition of securing better political control.

The driver behind this change was the ambition to shape a more unified organisation. Regardless of the location, it should look the same. However, the real purpose was to achieve better control of the Police. That’s not a secret [...]. Our stakeholders were pushing for us becoming a unified authority [...]. The political control from the Cabinet Office has grown much stronger. We now got a Minister making comments on the [television] news about individual operative events. That never happened back in the days. (Interview with former Regional Police Commissioner)

Our respondents shared mixed feelings. The increased politicisation means that the organisation is constantly monitored by politicians, which reduces its autonomy. Another new phenomenon is that politicians turn up at crime scenes.

It started with some shootings in Malmö in 2014. Unexpectedly, the Prime Minister turns up on the landing of the parents of one of the victims. The politicians’ inclination to visit the families of the victims escalated for a while but died down when the numbers of shootings went up. You can’t pay visits to 40 mourning families. I guess

they wanted a bit of media attention although it doesn't really change anything. Big words about action. (Interview with former Regional Police Commissioner)

From a less cynical angle, the respondents do express that it has been a positive learning curve from the politicians' side. They have obtained a far better understanding of the work and challenges of the police (and may have realised the impact of the reform). The flip side is that attention has been drawn towards the political leadership and initiatives such as promises about increasing the number of active police officers.

26,200 new officers is what the top management is asking for. I hear it several times every week – it's the political request. Regardless of the costs, they are adamant. (Interview, Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations)

The political push to meet quantitative recruitment targets has, according to a crime prevention report, led to the dismissal of experienced non-sworn investigative officers (Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, 2023).

The increased attention from both politicians and the media has had a notable impact on the police organisation. One visible change is that the police now operate one of the largest organisational communications units in the Swedish public sector. Some individual police officers have become very active and popular on social media, and as of this writing, the Commissioner of the Police Force has proposed a ban on wearing the uniform while engaging in social media activities (*Sveriges Television*, 11 December 2024). What we can conclude is that heightened media interest generates further political attention, with politicians using media engagement to highlight their involvement in crime-solving efforts.

In response to the growing politicisation, the police have introduced community policing. Inspired by reassurance policing in the US and neighbourhood policing in the UK, this initiative includes various 'guarantees' at the community level. Its goal is to build partnerships with local communities and foster greater trust through 'citizen guarantees'.

Identifying a direct link between the growth of an organisational professional bureaucracy and politicisation is not straightforward, but there are clear indications. First, the increased political attention and demands lead to a need for more staff. There is a risk that the growing focus on performance and reporting may divert attention from core police functions. In an audit report on local police visibility, one respondent remarked, 'We are feeding an elephant that can't stop eating' (The Internal Audit Office of the Police, 2021, p. 10). Second, the enhanced demand for social accountability leads to an enlarged focus on communication and image management.

### 5.2.5 Professionalisation

The Police doesn't resemble any other children. It lives in its own world without any external analysis. (Interview, Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations)

Following a public scandal in 2022, the issue of what constitutes police professionalism has become a prominent public debate. The issue was that top-level managers in the organisation were promoted to senior managerial roles without ever having served on the frontlines or received formal training in policing. The key question raised was whether senior managers within the organisation need to be 'genuine' police officers, or if other skills and experiences could contribute positively to the service. Regardless of the answer, this dilemma has deeply divided the organisation.

Our qualitative interviews reveal that few police officers can remain on patrol duty for extended periods throughout their careers. One of the interviewed union presidents (Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations) claimed that most police officers eventually seek secondment to work on police premises. In recent years, this career traffic has been coined 'the inwards/upwards movement' – away from patrol duty (inwards) and vertical advancement to more senior posts in more central locations (upwards). According to the internal auditors, this has been a trend for years (The Internal Audit Office of the Police, 2021; Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, 2023). Many local commissioners feel that their operations are not prioritised and that their staff are deployed to other roles within the organisation. The possibility for internal transfers constitutes a real challenge for the local commissioners (Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, 2023, p. 10). Furthermore, the aspiration to advance vertically creates clashes with the non-sworn civilian staff. As expressed in a crime prevention report: 'In order to thwart the vertical traffic upwards, we need to create incentives for staff to remain on lower levels' (ibid., p. 13). The local districts lost over 2,000 employees between 2017 and 2022 to higher levels. This pattern is repeated at higher levels within the organisation with a loss of institutional knowledge and experience at the community levels. The incentives to leave cumbersome and poorly paid patrol functions in exchange for better remunerated internal jobs are strong. While bleeding experienced staff from the core functions, the mobility of staff also generates tensions with the non-sworn staff ('the civilians') within the police organisation.

The police force perhaps doesn't emphasize competence and skills as much as in other sectors. Instead, it focuses more on personal qualities and relationships. A bobbie on the beat with strong individual traits can go far. There is also a hierarchy of roles, with some being more lucrative or viewed as more important for

promotions. However, the downside is that this culture can easily lead to favouritism and even compromise integrity. (Interview, civilian staff member, the police)

The president of the Police Association holds a different view and does not agree that there is a flow of staff from patrol duties to internal functions. Conversely, the professionalisation of the administrative functions has distorted the mutual understanding between the groups.

The negotiators representing the employers' side are all professional HR officers who don't understand Police work and the collective agreements. Previous collective bargaining teams had a far better organisational understanding as they knew the ropes unlike the current ones. (Interview, president of the Police Association)

An ex-commissioner made a similar comment regarding the people who drafted the new organisation in 2015 (a lawyer and an HR manager).

None of them had work experience from the Police. Police work is teamwork. I once told the Police Commissioner that he should devolve the organisation [again] and let the regional districts take back their previous responsibilities. [...] If the function [HR] is within the actual operational side, and belongs to the team, then people will be supportive. That is the problem with this centralisation. (Interview, former Regional Police Commissioner)

This quote reflects the tension between modern professionalised organisations and conceiving your own organisation as being so idiosyncratic that it needs a bespoke form of organisation. The president of the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations presents some more positive visions of bringing in new (university-trained) groups of staff.

The whole cybercrime space shows the demand for analytical and investigative skillsets. You see it in Europe where these roles are staffed with civilians. Internationally, you cannot work on a higher strategic level within the Police unless you have passed your PhD. An academic background is a prerequisite unlike here where the norm seems to be that police officers are jack of all trades. (Interview, Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations)

Specific, detailed, and often controversial performance indicators were developed from the 1990s onwards. However, compared with other major public service institutions (such as higher education), there is a lack of connection between results and allocated resources. Higher education institutions receive funding based on student enrolment, whereas the Swedish police force appears to be continuously allocated more resources despite underwhelming performance. One respondent suggests that the monitoring of the police resembles

the metaphorical ‘streetlight effect’, where indicators are conveniently chosen based on the availability of data, regardless of their relevance.

With the influx of professional groups, particularly HR professionals and accountants, discussions about the core functions of the organisation have emerged, including what should be monitored. Unlike higher education, it is difficult to discern what the police force is actually ‘producing’, particularly in the context of media attention on crime fighting and the rise of new forms of crime.

There is no doubt that organisational competencies within the police force have expanded, but compared with both universities and the Swedish Transport Agency, police officers with traditional training still compete for upward positions. Furthermore, the Swedish police force has become increasingly bureaucratic, with even sworn officers seeking bureaucratic roles. The force is influenced by efforts to make it more managerial, by political attempts to exert more control, and by internal pressures to create new and more attractive career paths. Regardless of the normative implications of these changes, they are shifting attention away from the police’s core operational activities. In contrast to the STA, the dynamics behind bureaucratisation within the police seem to be more internally driven and are related to the low status of traditional police work.

### 5.3 COMPARATIVE DISCUSSION

Our studies of the two national police forces reveal several commonalities, as well as some notable differences. We observe multiple overlaps in the history of the two forces, particularly in their modernisation processes (which is hardly surprising given their shared historical roots in the British model of policing). The discussions about integrating non-sworn groups into the organisations are also quite similar, with overlapping arguments and a gradual acceptance of new professional groups within the forces. Still, if we compare the police forces with the transport agencies (Chapter 4) and the universities (Chapter 6), administrative professionalisation has clearly been slower and started later. In the Swedish police, being a sworn officer is still a merit for advancing to higher, administrative posts.

Additionally, the political pressure on both police forces to be more proactive and visible in preventing and solving crime has influenced workforce composition in both countries, with an emphasis on increasing the number of actively patrolling officers. Whenever political attention shifts towards security and the justice system, the composition of the police workforce tends to become a focal point. However, politicians have not asked for more bureaucracy. At least in the Swedish case, the sharp increase in revenue in recent

years rather seems to interact with 'the inwards/upwards movement', making the internal drivers behind bureaucratisation stronger.

One difference is that the timelines have been asymmetric, with Sweden being an early adopter of managerial tools within its police force. As previously mentioned, the combination of managerialism and politicisation within the Swedish police has been a prominent public and academic discussion, epitomised by the term 'the paper police' (Ivarsson Westerberg, 2004). In contrast, New Zealand's police force remained largely insulated from the managerial public sector reforms of the 1980s and 1990s. This is reflected in a relatively weaker quantitative shift in the composition of New Zealand's police workforce, although organisational professionals have increased at a fast pace in recent years, while Sweden has seen significant growth in new organisational professional groups. The heated discussions in Sweden regarding internal and upward movement have no direct counterpart in New Zealand. What is clear, however, is that both police forces maintain a large body of sworn officers with a strong professional identity. Like the transport agencies, political control has clearly increased in both police forces, but the drivers behind bureaucratisation appear to be, at least in part, more strongly internal than within the transport agencies.

## 6. Universities and higher education

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There are almost no public institutions in society that are globally so similar in scope as universities. This can be conceived as the outcome of the never-ending demand for systematic knowledge (and researchers), but also as the result of universities being unique institutions. Despite different regulatory systems (where Sweden is an outlier with its universities formally being ‘ordinary’ state agencies), the ideals and norms of universities as sheltered spaces for the production of knowledge, hosts of academic freedom, and the purpose of both generating new knowledge and providing future employees in vastly different professions with skills, go back in history (Fairweather & Blalock, 2015). Even if universities are unique, a global trend during recent decades, related to the development of the mass university, has emphasised the necessity of improving the utility of both research and education as part of an ambition to increase growth, generate human capital, and modernise national economies. In this endeavour, universities – at least rhetorically – have become more business-like and entrepreneurial (Marginson & Considine, 2000), but also, with strong relevance to this book, more accountable to society.

First, universities are expected to be *strategically accountable*, adopting a more proactive strategic stance (rather than a reactive one). The institutions are expected to design their own strategic roadmaps, goals, and visions through organisational investments. Second, while public trust in universities has traditionally been high, recent decades have nevertheless been characterised by an increasing focus on organisational *accountability for quality*. As an accountable subject, the university must prepare itself – regarding quality in both research and education – for external scrutiny, not just from peers in the academic profession but also from the government and other actors. This naturally generates a perception of distrust in the academic profession (Hansen et al., 2019). It can also be perceived as a sign of a broader audit practice that views universities as organisations whose performance must be monitored (Kallio et al., 2020). Not only are individual research subjects and teaching offerings required to maintain high quality, but the university as an organisation is expected to maintain a unitary quality system for research and education. The third form of accountability is the impact of the competitive discourse in higher education – *market accountability*. This discourse exhibits

a constant scarcity of desirable resources, particularly students and researchers (cf. Arora-Jonsson et al., 2020), and a search for excellence in all the different activity areas. The discourse has transgressed into actual ranking and accreditation systems. While the supply of education, research, and, not least, student numbers continue to break new records every year, there is a deeply rooted rhetorical figure that global competition between institutions requires ever more competitive regimes. All in all, universities have both become more *organisationally* autonomous and more dependent on – and partly similar to – other actors in society (Aberbach & Christensen, 2018).

## 6.1 NEW ZEALAND

### 6.1.1 Background

Until the 1960s, the university sector was federated under the auspices of one institution – the University of New Zealand (UNZ) – with five campuses founded at different times.<sup>1</sup> Since the disestablishment of UNZ in 1961, three more universities have been added to the list.<sup>2</sup> The more vocational side of tertiary education, polytechnics, or institutes of technology, was first set up as technical schools in various towns in the 1880s and was run by local boards. They were put on equal footing with the universities in 1990 when the Education Amendment Act was passed, becoming independent legal entities with chief executives and similar accountability chains as the universities. Following the so-called 1987 Hawke report (Ad Hoc Cabinet Committee on Training and Employment, 1987) the Labour government of the time decided to modernise the sector completely through the 1989 Education Act.

Education was caught up in the general thrust (and excitement) of a questioning of all conventions and a determination to focus public policy on efficiency and equity. Every element of the policy was questioned, but abstention from reform was impossible. (Hawke, 2002, p. 3)

The report pointed out that the tertiary education system did not match the state of the economy, and in particular did not respond to the actual needs of the labour market. The 1989 Act abandoned the tuition-free system in exchange for the introduction of new types of student fees; subsidies were introduced to certain low-income groups, financial decision-making was devolved to

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<sup>1</sup> Otago (1869), Canterbury (1873), Auckland (1883), Wellington (Victoria) (1899), and Palmerston North (later renamed Massey) (1928).

<sup>2</sup> Waikato (Hamilton) (1964), Lincoln (1990), Auckland University of Technology (2000).

the individual institutions, and a general convergence of funding models was introduced for all the tertiary institutions based on the number of equivalent full-time students (EFTS) (Crawford, 2016). The succeeding National Party governments of the 1990s continued to follow the roadmap set out by the Labour government and the recommendations in the Hawke report. While the government continued to be the chief funder of tertiary education, private returns to education were emphasised. Furthermore, the goal of third-party financing (including debt) to meet additional costs was encouraged, just like increased targeting (i.e., reduction) of allowances, more student choice, and the institutional autonomy to set fees (McLaughlin, 2003).

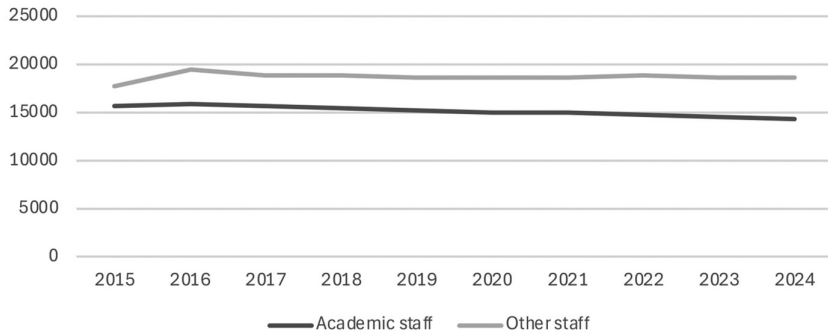
As expressed in an OECD report from the 1990s, the New Zealand approach to radically transform higher education was outstanding, and only superseded by the UK (OECD, 1997). While the 2000s have witnessed attempts by various governments to retake some control (e.g. through the 2002 Education Amendment Act, establishing the Tertiary Education Commission, TEC), the universities have managed to maintain their financial and managerial autonomy since the 1990s, very much operating independently on an increasingly international educational ‘market’. The vocational institutes of technology and polytechnics (ITPs) are in that context in a different position. Following financial misadventures in some of the institutions and subsequent mergers, the ITPs were federalised into one new national institution, Te Pūkenga (‘the Skills’, the formal name in English is: New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology) in 2021. At the time of writing (2024), the new government coalition has decided to disestablish Te Pūkenga and reinstall some of the regional ITPs. It is probably not wrong to conclude that while the universities in New Zealand have been targeting growth and increased sources of revenue since the 1980s, the ITPs have mainly struggled to survive.

### 6.1.2 The Rise of Organisational Professionals

A crude counting of full-time equivalents of the workforce working in New Zealand higher education institutions provides us with a picture of changes in the past ten years (Figure 6.1).

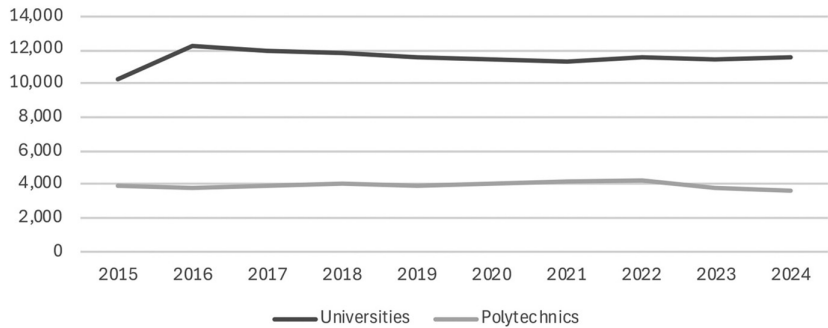
Meanwhile, it should be emphasised that universities have a significantly higher number of ‘other staff’ than the polytechnics (as well as the universities in Sweden) (Figure 6.2).

Also, the previous ten-year period (2002–2012) witnessed a more significant expansion of non-academic staff. Data from the Ministry of Education collected by Kierstead and Johnston (2023) uncover that the number of non-academics at universities increased from 7,170 in 2002 to 10,240 in 2015, representing a rise of 43 per cent. More than half of that increase had taken place by 2005 (*ibid.*, p. 14). Probably more importantly, the Kierstead and



Source: Ministry of Education (2024) <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/resources>.

*Figure 6.1 The total workforce in NZ tertiary education institutions (excluding research support staff) 2015–2024*



Source: Ministry of Education (2024) <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/resources>.

*Figure 6.2 Other staff in New Zealand higher education 2015–2024*

Johnston study traces the growth of non-academic staff back to the 1960s, with the major changes happening after the reforms in the 1990s (based on annual reporting from the universities; no official data exists before 2002). Their explanation, which is partly supported by a later study by the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2012) is that the total number of academic staff was reduced as the significant group of lecturers was replaced by part-time teaching staff, while universities began to employ a higher proportion

of senior academic staff (in response to higher research performance). In that context, the vocational polytechnics did not witness any significant changes in either academic or non-academic staff in the first decade of the 2000s.

In addition to the general development, we managed to retrieve workforce data kindly shared by two universities and three polytechnics (ITPs) (presented in an earlier article, Löfgren et al., 2022b). We used our own coding scheme distinguishing the organisational professional staff (based on the ANZCO definitions of the occupations). Here we generally find a similar pattern with higher growth among organisational professionals than other (academic and administrative) groups in the two studied universities, while more moderate changes occurred in the three polytechnics. In one of the studied universities, the number of organisational professionals increased by 59.4 per cent between 2006 and 2020. In all cases, the prevailing trend is clear: organisational professional staff numbers grew in all five case studies, by a minimum of 6.5 per cent, while the share of occupational professionals and assorted other staff shrank.

Notwithstanding that this headcount exercise suffers from lacking more granulated data, we feel it is safe to conclude a few things. First, the group of organisational professionals we have identified has experienced strong growth over the years. Meanwhile, this growth has been disproportionate compared with both the academics and other types of administrative staff at the universities. Second, there are substantial differences between the universities and the polytechnics in the New Zealand tertiary educational sector. The changes in the funding system, which have benefitted the universities, tell us that one of the basic reasons for the demonstrated expansion of a new type of bureaucracy can probably be explained by better sources of revenue among the universities.

### 6.1.3 Managerialism

The managerialism of higher education originating during the reforms in the 1980s in New Zealand has been well covered in the academic literature. The combination of fiscal autonomy, new governance structures replacing the traditional collegial structures, competition between ‘providers’ operating in an educational market, and the establishment of monitoring and auditing bodies all contributed to making higher education institutions more ‘corporate’ (Larner & Le Heron, 2005; Abbott, 2006; Shore, 2010; Chong et al., 2018). The reforms also meant that the erstwhile borders between universities and polytechnics were, if not broken down, at least experiencing a blurring of boundaries (Abbott, 2006). The polytechnics, once restricted to vocational training within local regions, expanded into what had traditionally had been university territory, including degree programmes and the establishment of campuses outside the home region. Furthermore, the redefinition of the ‘contract’ between

the state and the citizens, rendering education a private good, contributed to a transactional provider–consumer relationship. There is an underlying negative tenor in the academic literature regarding how these revisions have normalised neoliberal reforms (Shore, 2010). Although our other sources of data confirm the changes, these negative comments are, to some extent moderated by the voices in our qualitative data. First of all, higher education, and particularly the universities, are described as antiquated, unstructured, and dysfunctional institutions prior to the reforms. One of our respondents shared some personal experiences:

You know at the point when I joined [University X]. I would describe it as unprofessional in some quite alarming ways. Alarming in terms of things were very informal. A lot of decisions were made by people who were insiders, and who were relying on experience. (Former senior policy advisor, Ministry of Education, and university manager)

An even more brutal description of the lack of professional staff is found in an interview with a senior faculty manager about the same era:

I came to the university in 1986. For me, it was like going backward from the 21st to the 17th century. The university had a bursar. It had two accountants. That was really about it. (Interview in Chong et al., 2018, p. 931)

As the collegial system of governance was gradually being replaced by a more managerial system, new groups of professional managers moved into the institutions, as in Sweden (see below). This created, in some instances, governance structures that reduced the participation of academics.

Historically our academic institutions were led by academics who probably were more senior academics and who would have a split role. They would probably still teach. [...] We made a conscious decision in the organisation review 2017–18 to actually lift, to disestablish those positions and create managerial positions that maybe had the greatest parameter of control. (Manager, polytechnic)

Second, there has, since the changes to the Education Act in 2002, been an increasing focus on securing and enhancing quality assurance and performance in both teaching and research. This is truly reflected in the series of Tertiary Education Strategies that have been published since 2005, and not least through the introduction of Performance-Based Research Funding (PBRF), which was introduced by the government in the 2000s, as well as university rankings, as expressed in the 2010–2015 strategy.

It is vital that we can see the real value of the public investment in tertiary education. We will continue to undertake system-level monitoring that assesses the broad

contribution that tertiary education makes to New Zealand's economy and society. (Office of the Minister for Tertiary Education, 2009, p. 22)

Finally, the respondents and other documentary sources do acknowledge that managerialism has affected the composition of staff at the university. In an open letter to the government published in *The Post* in November 2023, a group of senior academics (predominantly from Auckland University) point out the issue of the growth of non-academic staff.

The non-academic to academic staff ratio, which is at 1.5, should be reduced to an acceptable level (<1.0). The free market model for the universities has not worked particularly well in New Zealand, as managerialism has become endemic to the system, and the ever-expanding administrative bureaucracies have not been subject to the same scrutiny of performance and strategy that occurs in high-performing private sector companies. (Schwerdtfeger & Raine, 2023)

These employees thus argue that there is management of the universities, but not of the administration of the universities.

#### 6.1.4 Politicisation

Unlike many other policy domains, higher education has not been an area with much political intervention. The tertiary education strategic directions from various governments have, since they were initially developed, basically been addressing the same type of objectives (with some of them even dating back to the 1980s). First, a focus on relevance with respect to ensuring the right skills and knowledge for the New Zealand workforce. Second, creating opportunities and outcomes for marginalised groups with little experience of higher education (e.g. disabled learners, Māori, and Pacific learners). Third, contributing through teaching and research to social, economic, and other goals in society broadly, and more localised in the communities. As pointed out by a former senior policy adviser, politicians have not, over the years, tried to get too involved in tertiary education.

They weren't so much interested in how things ran. They were interested more in the results that were achieved. They were concerned obviously you know with things like data integrity and that kind of thing. (Senior policy advisor, tertiary education)

Rather than the political masters dictating the direction of higher education in New Zealand, there are voices claiming that at least the universities (rather than the polytechnics) are more powerful in setting the agenda.

They (the Ministers) were fiercely lobbied by the Vice Chancellors in particular. Who were very good at sort of taking the Minister aside and persuading them how wonderful they were. And you know to some extent the Vice Chancellors. This didn't apply in other parts of the system but the Vice Chancellors in my view were always taken very, very seriously. They weren't necessarily agreed with, they were sometimes treated as a problem. But they were never ignored. When a Vice Chancellor said something, it always mattered you know. So, I used to feel a bit sorry for other parts of the system because they were never taken as seriously. So, the Polytech Chief Executives were, many of whom were very capable people. Were always regarded as sort of I don't know lesser mortals, I guess. Whereas the Vice Chancellors were, even though they were often not regarded as [...] They could never be ignored because they had too much clout in the community. So, they were always listened to carefully. Not necessarily agreed with. (Senior policy advisor, tertiary education)

Universities are caught up in a tension between, on the one hand, being largely autonomous with respect to financing, HR, and management, while at the same time relying heavily on government funding.

The research side has, to some extent also been subject to politicisation, although the main source of revenue is distributed through the government's direct funding to universities based on a performance-based model (PBRF). Although not in the public spotlight, there has, over the years, been a bit of discord regarding the limited existing public research funding for independent and non-strategic research distributed by the Royal Society of New Zealand. There were also accusations that money was spent on dubious research projects by some right-wing politicians. The Coalition government also decided to terminate any funding for the humanities and social sciences from the Royal Society of New Zealand in 2024.

### **6.1.5 Professionalisation**

While our qualitative data confirm the role of managerialism and politicisation as contributing factors to changes in the composition of the workforce at universities, the professionalisation of universities and polytechnics in New Zealand seems to be the chief reason for new non-academic professionals marching into the educational institutions. Both documentary sources and our qualitative voices are explicit about a historical lack of professionalism within the New Zealand higher educational institutions. Many of these narratives refer to early personal experiences in their careers, describing rather dysfunctional organisations with little, if any, knowledge and understanding of administrative support functions and roles.

So, when I first started in the old days, we, you know there wasn't much that we were required to do in those areas whereas now we have a whole mental health

well-being and requirements to have your finger on the pulse much more than we did 10 or 15 years ago. (Head of HR, polytechnic)

It also reflected I think changes in the community. And in the labour market where you know it became more important to think about things like say the professional development of staff. You know like in the past particularly on the academic side there'd been quite an informal sense of things weren't documented. (Senior policy advisor, tertiary education)

The professionalisation endeavour includes a combination of various pressures. The first one, as already mentioned above, is the goal to bring the institutions in line with what is considered to be 'modern organisations' with professional staff overseeing various internal support functions such as finances, HR, communication, etc. This in contrast to a previous context where the administrative side was understaffed, and the operational side of the organisations was run by seconded (and underperforming) academic staff. The second pressure of professionalisation emanates from external pressures from stakeholders expecting the institutions to comply with certain standards. This requires continuous training and education for all staff and the establishment of units with staff supporting this. Finally, technological advancement (particularly IT) has contributed to the creation of new professional roles and units. While their work is split between the interests of both internal and external constituencies, these groups are now pivotal for the operation of the organisation, as well as its reputation, brand, and marketing.

## 6.2 SWEDEN

### 6.2.1 Background

The history of universities in Sweden dates to medieval times and the establishment of Uppsala University in 1477.<sup>3</sup> However, for most of history, the universities remained small autonomous entities in the shadow of the Church and the state. This changed dramatically in the post-Second World War period. Following Börjesson and Dalberg (2021), the development of higher education in the post-war period can (from a political view) be divided into four separate periods. First, a 'massification' period (1955–1977) where the number of institutions as well as student numbers rapidly expanded due to an increasing

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<sup>3</sup> This was followed by the takeover or foundation of universities in the seventeenth century in the border provinces of the Swedish Empire with Dorpat [Tartu] (1632), Åbo [Turku] (1640), Greifswald (1648), and Lund (1666). Although not universities, the establishment of the medical school Karolinska in 1810, and the university colleges in Stockholm (1877) and Gothenburg (1891) represent other important milestones in the evolution of higher education.

labour shortage of professionals in the growing welfare state. This first period also witnessed a formalisation of entry requirements to higher education as well as the creation of financial support mechanisms for students. Second, in the years 1977–1992, and following various government commission reports, a national unification and standardisation of higher education to better match labour market needs (vocationalism) occurred. In addition to the establishment of a central admission agency, this period also changed the funding model of higher education by introducing block grants and distinct price tags for different fields of study. Third, a period from 1993 onwards where higher education became both more market-oriented and received a more prominent status as beacons for establishing a national ‘innovation policy’. Universities and colleges were conferred more autonomy with respect to teaching and learning, academic appointments, etc., while simultaneously becoming more monitored and controlled through various accountability and incentive mechanisms (e.g. evaluations and accreditation). Higher education became subjected to the market logics of student demand and competition between institutions. The independent status was further pronounced in the so-called ‘Autonomy Reform’ in 2011 (Ahlbäck Öberg & Boberg, 2023). Finally, from Sweden’s entry to the European Union onwards, higher education was affected by European integration and the standardisation of higher education through mechanisms such as Erasmus and the Bologna process.

During the post-Second World War period, the number of students increased from 14,000 in 1945 to 363,100 students in 2022, and the number of institutions has increased from three universities in 1945 to 16 universities in 2023 (plus an additional 12 institutions with partial research accreditation). Even though the mass university emerged during the 1960s, the most significant expansion took place from the turn of the century onwards, where the number of exams increased by 124 per cent between 2000 and 2024. In 2021, 30 per cent of the population in Sweden had a first-cycle university education (three years), which is double the number in 2000. In the age group 25–64, 45 per cent of the population (more than 50 per cent of females) had gone through some form of higher education in 2021 (Statistics Sweden “Students and Exams in Higher Education”, 2025).

So, despite the ritual conversations about universities and colleges being characterised by organisational inertia, the changes have been far-reaching. The transformation from small academies educating an elite minority to mass universities has spurred an enormous organisational expansion to meet the influx of students. The universities and university colleges increased their revenues by almost 70 per cent in the first two decades of the century (Hallonsten, 2024). Furthermore, this transformation has inevitably affected society, as an increasing part of the labour force (particularly the public sector) is very

well-educated. This is crucial to the issues of professionalisation that are at the centre of concern for this book.

## 6.2.2 The Rise of Organisational Professionals

The expansion of the mass university has been accompanied by a process of administrative professionalisation, although we can witness a similar expansion of academic staff. Permanent positions as professors and senior lecturers (as FTEs) have increased by 74 per cent between 2001 and 2023 (The Swedish Higher Education Authority workforce data, 2024), while the overall growth of staff (FTEs) has been 35 per cent during the same period. However, if we include junior academic staff (such as research assistants and lecturers), the increase in academic staff amounts to 40 per cent. The percentage of non-academic staff (including university librarians) as part of the personnel has even dropped slightly, from 36 to 33 per cent between 2001 and 2023. However, the administrative staff has increased by 64 per cent, while technical staff has diminished by 13 and librarians by 23 per cent. A significant caveat is that academic staff who are promoted to managerial and/or administrative positions are still labelled as academic staff in the statistical material. There has been a strong restructuring of non-academic staff, where the dominating trend, in Sweden as elsewhere, is that university qualifications are required for administrative staff (Aberbach & Christensen, 2018).

Another statistical source (The Swedish Agency for Government Employers) shows that groups such as HR, communicators, policy analysts, and legal experts have all increased by more than 100 per cent from 2004 to 2023 at higher educational institutions in Sweden. Financial officers show a more moderate growth, but this group has witnessed an increase in staff with university qualifications. In 2018, financial officers and controllers with academic degrees dominated. If we go back to 2001, the most common occupational titles in the financial departments were either superintendents or finance administrators, normally short of university qualifications (Agevall & Olofsson, 2020).

Hence, it can be argued that Swedish universities and university colleges have witnessed how university qualifications have become a basic requirement for both academic and non-academic staff. Positions at the top of the academic scale have increased strongly while the number of junior academic staff has decreased. This pattern is even more significant on the administrative side, which nowadays is dominated by university-trained staff. There are obviously advantages to this administrative professionalisation (which we will return to below), but it may also induce clashes, not least in the efforts to shape a modern, professional organisation in the context of traditional, academic values.

### **6.2.3 Managerialism**

Despite the dramatic changes outlined above, the most significant component of the universities' exceptionalism still lives on in the form of informal, institutional norms around academic freedom in teaching and research. Meanwhile, there is a growing distinction between education and research, with an increasing emphasis on 'buying yourself out of teaching' through external research income, which signals that research has gained a significantly higher status than education during the expansion of the mass university.

Despite institutional continuity, the organisational expansion has led to major changes. Following a relatively short period of government attempts to monitor and control educational investments, the 1993 Higher Education Ordinance increased the autonomy of the higher education institutions while introducing performance-based management within the sector (something which was further accentuated by Sweden's entry into the European Union and its policies on harmonising higher education – the so-called 'Bologna process'). Above all, the universities were conferred control over their own organisation, internal resource allocation, and professorial appointments in line with the delegated personnel policy and performance-based management that was implemented throughout the state sector in the 1990s (as universities are formally state agencies in Sweden, see next section). Meanwhile, the institutions were concurrently faced with a tougher financial funding model tailored to a mass production model of education. A differentiated model of teaching funding was implemented, with different disciplines and courses releasing different government allowances (Gustavsson, 2022). This created incentives for an overproduction of students in areas with a high reimbursement level (although there was a cap on overproduction). However, underproduction constituted an ever more significant problem, as this could potentially render reduced funding the following year. Even if the number of students is planned and compensation for overproduction is not normally paid, there is still much to indicate that the universities have, in practice, moved towards educational offerings with higher price tags. This student allowance is expected to cover all costs including occupancy, administrative support, IT, and libraries, etc. The two income streams of revenue, education and research, are supposed to cover almost all expenses, which warrants tough discussions on internal priorities. Occupancy is one of the more interesting cost areas as the universities have witnessed significant increases in rent. Higher education institutions lost the ownership of their buildings in the 1990s with the establishment of a government real estate agency maintaining and developing the properties, leasing them back to the institutions. The institutions now spend around 10 per cent of their total revenues on rent, with new premises located in attractive locations being high-priced.

Notwithstanding the introduction of performance-based management, it can be argued that the universities' *organisational* autonomy has been enhanced since 1993, providing the institutions with discretionary freedom regarding priorities. There are naturally limitations, as the institutions are subjected to the market powers of student demands, and some degrees require accreditation from professional bodies.

So, the organisational autonomy does not necessarily equal 'freedom', but rather that the institutions represent a centrally directed and unified organisation (rather than a confederation) setting its own strategic priorities. Studies of the outcomes of the reform in 1993 clearly show how the power over decision-making was centralised from collegial bodies to university management (see e.g. Askling et al., 1999; Bladh, 2007; Ahlbäck Öberg & Boberg, 2023). This institutional centralisation at a local level is the direct outcome of the attempts to devolve and decentralise. The new organisational autonomy has subsequently generated several accountability requirements. As described in the introduction to this chapter, accountabilities for strategy, quality and competition have all left their mark on Swedish university organisations, although it may be argued that especially strategic accountability is partly rhetorical, where the core operations are still fragmented and delegated. However, financial accountability has also become a key issue for Swedish higher education institutions.

On the one hand, it is easy to make the claim that the *financial autonomy* of Swedish universities has decreased since the 1990s. As already mentioned, the institutions no longer own their properties and buildings, and the rent of occupancy amounts to ten per cent of their total revenue. Furthermore, and more importantly, student remuneration levels are centrally decided according to a system of price tags for FTE students and year-round performance. Overproduction of students is not compensated by the government funding mechanism. Additionally, academic freedom in research has subsided due to the increased dependence on external research grants from funding bodies such as the Swedish Research Council, where 'strategic' investments often direct research questions and approaches. Furthermore, the public sector productivity deduction, which applies to all state institutions, dictates annual efficiency increases. While this applies to all public sector organisations, it impacts the higher education sector harder, as it is difficult to make the teaching side more efficient (Gustavsson, 2022). However, in practice, even if the universities have become production-oriented entities, there is considerable room for manoeuvre. The universities can decide to redistribute the price tags internally. They can choose to opt for cheaper occupancy (which rarely happens). Above all, they are entitled to roll over residual government funding to the next budget. This is something all universities do, which has been noted several times as an inefficient use of resources (Swedish National Audit Office, 2017, p. 28). The

universities' accumulated capital amounted to roughly 14 billion Swedish kronor in 2023, which is a staggering 17 per cent of the total annual costs for the university sector (The Government Budget Bill 2024/25, p. 1). This makes the universities' constant claim for more resources ring somewhat hollow, as from a purely financial point of view the universities are sound with a clear financial mandate to the leadership.

The new organisational accountabilities are, by and large, the backdrop for the increase in professional administrative support functions in higher education institutions. The ambition to enhance the autonomy of higher education institutions manifests itself through a centralisation to the top echelons of the organisations rather than generating freedom for the academics. However, this aspiration for local centralisation should not be seen as an absolutist colonisation of the front-line levels. Quite the contrary, the managerial levels and the 'coalface of academia' (adhering to strong institutional norms) are most often detached. For example, the European ambitions of integrating and standardising higher education through the Bologna process may appear to be a clear attempt to secure performance management from the outside. Meanwhile, there is probably every reason to believe that the actual delivery of higher education remains unchanged. The tough challenge of making the budget balance is delegated to middle managers (the heads of the units) who have been assigned the thankless task of making ends meet without having any influence on the financial conditions, let alone the distribution of resources. This was identified as the major problem for university management in a government commissioned report (SOU 2015:92). As addressed by a former vice-chancellor (interview), the head of department's job is 'a hole in the floor, all the crap is swept down'. Since this group of middle managers is the one with the greatest staff responsibility at these institutions, they often interact with the organisational professionals (finance and HR) although not being part of their reporting lines. In summary, universities have greatly strengthened their character as a unified organisation in recent decades, although day-to-day activity is loosely coupled.

#### **6.2.4 Politicisation**

Because of the ideals of academic freedom, comprehensive politicisation of academic activities is often criticised. Nevertheless, political control has tightened over time, especially in research and development. From its embryonic beginnings in the 1940s, the government research councils now distribute a third of all public research funding in Sweden. Although the final decision on funding is based on traditional academic peer-review processes, the investments themselves are often politically and strategically motivated, as political control over research investments has undoubtedly increased (Demker, 2010).

Research represents a large item in the financial budget (over 3 per cent of total government spending, SOU 2023:59) and there is a natural inclination from the political side to monitor spending. In particular, the innovation side of research has attracted some major public investments since the twentieth century, accentuated by transnational organisations such as the EU and OECD (Hall, 2020). In addition, global mainstreaming trends around sustainability, gender equality, and diversity have resulted in an increasing politicisation of higher education institutions, making them political battlefields between conflicting political views.

While higher education and research have increasingly risen on the political agenda, politicians seem to have been less interested in the outcomes of these investments. Requests for research grants from one of the many government funding mechanisms are subjected to extensive review processes prior to approval, whereas there is very little interest in evaluating the results. Likewise, a former liberal-centre government introduced a more thorough scrutiny of master's and bachelor's theses from 2006 to 2010 (which resulted in several institutions losing their accreditation to offer some degrees). However, this evaluation system deviated from the 'standards and guidelines' developed within the framework of ENQA (The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education), and Sweden was even excluded from the organisation. This led to a total revision of the evaluation system, downplaying the performance in teaching and research. Consequently, the performance focus is limited to the financial side of higher education.

Still, the political direction over the universities has become more pronounced. According to Ahlbäck Öberg and Boberg (2024), this is caused by an increasing 'agencification' of universities mirroring the governance structures of any other state agency and being asked to comply with detailed regulations in areas such as health and safety, auditing, internal governance and control, and risk management:

... increasing political governance takes precedence through the gradual addition of various political objectives – or raised ambitions for already existing assignments – in everything from gender equality to beneficial and sustainable development, which is often followed by demands for the establishment of action plans, systematic work processes and reporting back. These risks are crowding out the core mission; education, and research, and are leading to an administration that must respond to external pressures rather than being an internal support function. (Ahlbäck Öberg & Boberg, 2024, pp. 70–71, our translation from Swedish)

Despite these signs of politicisation in the Swedish higher education sector, this is probably less significant compared with the police and the Swedish Transport Administration. That being said, the ambition to fold the Swedish

universities into the portfolio of a state agency, and mimic the management of these has inevitably resulted in a demand for more professional administrators.

### **6.2.5 Professionalisation**

There is a long tradition, not only in Sweden, where administrative tasks at universities are perceived as a kind of guardianship of academic values (see Ackroyd et al., 2007, who use the concept ‘custodian’ for this guardianship) and the university’s autonomy. Consequently, higher administrative role descriptions require academic experience with candidates recruited internally on fixed-term contracts as a form of academic ‘national service’ obligation:

But then Carl-Gustaf Andrén became university chancellor, and then the shortage of vice-chancellors began to become noticeable here because no one volunteered. [...] Following my service as Dean, I had returned to my academic position and started a wonderful new research project. I felt that I had concluded my service obligations in administration. Subsequently, a group of students from the university appointment committee approached me and begged me to run for the VC post. They had received clear signals that the Social Democratic government was going to appoint an external candidate, possibly someone with the right party membership, unless a candidate from the local university could be identified. (Interview with former Vice Chancellor)

Even if this anecdote is probably exaggerated, there has been a visible change with regard to the status of executive positions at Swedish universities. Not just Vice Chancellors, but also other managerial positions render high salaries and (except for Vice Chancellors who have to be professors) recruit managers from other public sector organisations, which illustrates that universities are becoming ‘normalised’ agencies in the Swedish state. For instance, at the time of writing, the head of administration at Lund University has a law background and was recruited from the police, while the equivalent at Uppsala University is a former HR manager from the National Audit Office. Some decades ago, these university directors were always recruited internally and were often administrative amateurs. Of course, this professionalisation of the administrative side, including fewer senior posts, has naturally impacted positively on the capability of the administrative side in the same manner as in New Zealand. One recently resigned Vice Chancellor has only positive things to say about it (interview) and rather turns his critique towards former academic colleagues:

My experience from having held various management positions and on the university board, is that the challenge is actually this collegiality, often self-serving, not paying attention to the needs and circumstances of other departments or faculties. This creates some issues. In my capacity as a Dean I experienced that the other

deans took no interest in the other faculties. They only wanted to talk about their own financial needs .... (Interview with former Vice Chancellor)

Considering this criticism, administrative professionalisation is fundamentally a process for developing organisational cohesion and accountability, and for refuting departmental self-centredness and internal machinations. Equally, this is a process that transforms the university from a confederation (the original meaning of the term university) to a unified organisation, and that this potentially harbours some conflicts. First, while a Vice Chancellor conflates administrative professionalisation with support for her/his role, the individual lecturer only sees diminished administrative support. Not least because of the expansion of digital platforms, lecturers may have to perform the basic administrative functions themselves, with the administrative amateurism being pushed down the hierarchy:

While new functions and new types of personnel have been added, others have been phased out; not least does this apply to clerks and administrative support at the departmental level. New administrative departments and units with a focus on governance, monitoring and evaluation have expanded within all higher education institutions. [...] The frontline service functions close to the lecturers at departmental level have witnessed significant reductions, while new professional groups have increased the managerial and monitoring capacity. (Agevall & Olofsson, 2020, pp. 56–57, our translation from Swedish)

Consequently, there is a risk of conflicts when the administration becomes professionalised. The transition from routine-based tasks to more advanced and skilled role descriptions may leave the academic staff without the administrative staff who have moved on beyond more routine-based tasks. Second, it is possible that a situation of loose coupling between core activities and the professionalised administration becomes intensified. On the one hand is the academic organisation which is not ‘one’ organisation but a variety of organisations with features of a network. Equally, the administrative organisation tries to mould the organisation through a specific form, partly in the shape of a government agency governed through regulation, partly also based on the business-inspired organisational ideals that were described in the section on managerialism. That is, it is primarily the professional administration that takes care of the formal organisation building, rather than the academics themselves (except those academics who have advanced to administrative assignments), but with very little relevance for the core operations. If an administrative career track becomes attractive also for the academics – a sign of this is the inflation of the title “pro vice-chancellor” (*vicerektor*) in Sweden – even academic leaders in the administrative organisation may become alienated from the core operations of research and teaching.

### 6.3 COMPARATIVE DISCUSSION

The global similarities and diffusion mechanisms which were described in the introduction of this chapter imply that we expected – despite different regulations – stronger similarities between higher education institutions (HEIs) in New Zealand and Sweden than within the police and transport sectors. While there are some temporal asymmetries in the historical development between Sweden and New Zealand, the sectors have also followed similar trajectories. The managerial reforms of the 1990s affected not only the governance structures and the role of academics but have in some ways reinvented the purpose of higher education, including the traditional roles of academics and students. However, managerialism has not been the only driver. Political interest, as well as striving to make higher education institutions more ‘modern’ through the professionalisation of administrative support, have contributed to the transformations. In both countries, revenues have increased, which, of course, has made this professionalisation process possible. In terms of commonalities, our descriptive data firstly demonstrate similar patterns, with academics increasing slowly over the years, organisational professionals expanding rapidly (especially in New Zealand universities), and traditional administrative and secretarial staff being reduced. Although there are nuances between both countries and individual institutions, the overall trend is clear. Increasing administrative professionalisation is also distinctly notable in Denmark, Norway, Germany, the UK, and USA (Stage & Aagaard, 2019; Stage, 2020). In a study of Denmark, Stage and Aagaard (2019) also show a marked difference in salaries between degree-holding administrative professionals (who are increasing in numbers rapidly) and clerks (who are decreasing in numbers).

Second, the ‘consumerism’ and performance-based discourse of higher education in both countries can be linked to the growth of new layers of bureaucracy at the expense of other groups. Increased competition, the need to make the educational institution visible, and not least the expectation to ‘perform’ as an organisation across various accountable areas have created a demand for a new type of capability in the sector. The establishment of one of these accountability mechanisms often starts an administrative snowballing process. In both countries, what can best be described as ‘administrative amateurism’ through internally recruited academics in administrative posts prevailed in earlier times. However, in modern days we are instead witnessing a clearer division between academics (pursuing their traditional professional roles but also given new administrative tasks since basic administrative support has diminished) and administrative professionals, performing the modern organisation. Although the professionalisation of the administrative chore has

been conceived as something positive, it inevitably means that the administrative side has become increasingly detached from the core academic activities.

Third, our findings also point to the fact that there is a tendency in higher education where academics are taking up administrative and managerial roles on a more permanent basis. Not only does that blur some of our descriptive statistics (as these groups still appear as academics in the statistics), but these administrative roles are increasingly attractive even for academics. The emergence of the mass university in both countries has deprived some of the traditional activities of their status (particularly teaching), whereas the status of bureaucratic activities without doubt has been enhanced.

Finally, both countries have seen a drastic change in financial management with the introduction of a performance regime, most notably focused on the production of students. Whereas the universities and colleges (except for the ITPs in New Zealand) have increased their revenues, the performance regime only monitors the core production, not the expansion of bureaucracy. The arsenal of performance mechanisms, benchmarking exercises, etc. has expanded with very little interest as to whether it has made a positive contribution to the institutions. This bureaucracy produces a modern and accountable, albeit expensive, organisation. One side-effect of this development is that the previous 'open' higher education institution with participants arriving and departing (as described in the seminal article by Cohen et al., 1972), has been replaced by a more secluded organisation demarcating its territory against external competitors and surroundings and requiring loyalty to the organisation rather than to the broader academic community.

## 7. The rise of accountability bureaucracy: conclusions and reflections

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In this final chapter, we will recapitulate our empirical findings and connect these to our theoretical departure in Chapters 1 and 2. In brief, we will argue:

- There is a quantitative growth of organisational professionals in both New Zealand and Sweden.
- Our three factors – managerialism, politicisation, and professionalisation – play a role, not least the tension between politics and management, which was discussed at the end of Chapter 3.
- However, there are also potential internal drivers behind bureaucratisation, not least through the combination of status and the increase in revenues. When revenues increase, so do the possibilities for organisational professionalism. At the same time, there is less performance monitoring over administrative functions.
- Many of our comparative findings, whether differences or commonalities, were unexpected.

### 7.1 ORGANISATIONAL PROFESSIONALS ARE ON THE RISE: TOWARDS AN ACCOUNTABILITY BUREAUCRACY?

In this book, we have ascertained the proposition that a specific occupational group, organisational professionals in the public sector, has emerged as a response to decades of growing managerialism, politicisation, and professionalisation. These shifts have driven an increasing demand for enhanced accountability measures and practices. This, in turn, has prompted a bureaucratisation process, placing greater emphasis on the resilience and welfare of organisations, as well as their ability to manage operations effectively.

What has been central to our study is not merely the crude headcount of selected occupational groups, but specifically the growth rate of organisational professionals – an increase that surpasses that of other occupational categories

within the public sector workforce. This allows us to partially corroborate long-standing anecdotal claims voiced both by liberal critics of the public sector and by leftist trade unions defending traditional professions. However, the rise of organisational professionals is not limited to the public sector. Their growing presence in the private sector as well suggests a broader redefinition of bureaucracy – shifting from a strict separation between politics and administration to a hybrid model. This new model blends political demands for transparency, responsiveness, and governance at a distance with managerial demands for control, coherence, and delegation. Modern bureaucracy, in this sense, centres on the notion of the ‘accountable organisation’, which serves as a vehicle for integrating these political and managerial imperatives more thoroughly than in earlier forms. This shift, in turn, drives the growing demand for organisational professionals.

When launching the concept of accountability bureaucracy as a mix of politics and administration, it must immediately be noted that this is the opposite of what is often claimed to be one of the central tenets of NPM, namely, to separate politics and administration. It may be true that this was a serious purpose of several public management reforms in the past, but in practice, as discussed in Chapter 1, the purposes of the reforms were contradictory from the beginning since ‘politics’ cannot escape its responsibility for the public sector. Rather than representing an ambition to de-politicise public administration, we would argue that managerialism (as well as marketisation) was an act of politicisation by delegating accountability for service provision to public administration. Although not representing a radical transformation, the long-term effect has been that the public sector organisations accept more political functions with increased focus on accountability. During this process, of course, politicians have not refrained from actively interfering with the public sector organisations. Quite the contrary, we have witnessed how political pressure on agencies has increased (with the expanding letters of instruction to agencies in the transport sector representing a good example). Thus, whereas intentions may be to establish clear-cut distributions of accountability, in practice, public agencies perform both political and administrative tasks, which in effect leads to the construction and performance of the accountable organisation.

## 7.2 INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL DRIVERS BEHIND BUREAUCRATISATION

To what extent are the changes in the composition of the public workforce driven by external factors and actors (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017), and to what extent are they the result of internal organisational or even individual motivations (Pfeffer, 1978)? One example of the latter is Dunleavy’s classical *bureau-shaping* theory (Dunleavy, 1991), which suggests that bureaucrats do

not seek to maximise budgets or create large organisations. Instead, the primary motivation for any (senior) bureaucrat is to 'reshape their departments as small staff agencies, removed from the line responsibilities and hence more insulated from adverse impacts in the event of overall spending reductions in their policy area' (Dunleavy, 1989, p. 252). Dunleavy highlights, as an example, how policymaking roles (which we include in our definition of organisational professionals) are increasingly seen as more advantageous for individual career advancement compared with traditional operational functions. The changes within the two transport agencies provide a clear example of this. In both countries, politically driven reforms led to privatisation and significant organisational downsizing. However, the goal of creating smaller, more strategic transport agencies was far from realised. While the implementation side (i.e. constructing and maintaining infrastructure) was outsourced, the core organisation became burdened with additional layers of strategic and informational professionals and managers. As one of our New Zealand respondents puts it: '[Senior managers] building up their own little empires of corporate roles'. One factor that may interact with individual motivations is the increase in resources that has characterised the transport agencies in both countries, the university sector (excluding the New Zealand polytechnics), and the Swedish police force in recent years. If we accept Dunleavy's argument that policymaking and organisational professional roles are inherently attractive, and combine this with managerial discretion over corporate overheads, there is potential for growth in organisational and bureaucratic capacity, rather than spending resources on core activities, whereas performance monitoring of the administrative side of the organisation is underdeveloped. This argument aligns somewhat with the liberal perspective on bureaucratisation, which suggests that a lack of control over internal resource allocation contributes to this trend. It also aligns with an apparent failure to govern the administration of the agencies themselves, aside from almost mythical phrases such as 'stewardship' and 'trust-based government'. While Sweden has not undergone straightforward reform of administrative rationalisation during the period under investigation, New Zealand's administrative cap on staff has led to escalating costs from hiring external consultants.

However, these internal dynamics naturally interact with external forces. For instance, the increase in revenues mentioned earlier, which interacts with internal factors, is ultimately a political decision. Moreover, in both countries – particularly within the transport agencies, and to a lesser extent in the police forces – there has been a growing focus on broader political ambitions. The transport agencies appear to serve as projection screens for contradictory political objectives: rational planning, marketisation, climate change response, customer focus, regulatory roles, etc. Responding to these conflicting aspirations requires that the agencies build some bespoke organisational capacities. The

qualitative interviews in our study highlight a narrative of recently emerged or reconfigured groups of organisational professionals, primarily working to enhance the cohesion and accountability of the organisation (e.g. information professionals, HR, finance, and more broadly 'advisory' and managerial roles). Our respondents have noted the expansion of managerial staff, the introduction of new managerial tiers, and the creation of novel titles and job descriptions at the top levels of these organisations. Trends that our descriptive data also align with the literature on bureaucratisation and public sector reforms.

Our data suggest that these developments can be viewed as examples of managerialism, leading to a fragmented public sector with autonomous entities competing for resources and visibility. Alternatively, they can be seen as part of a broader quest to secure more political control through the implementation of new accountability mechanisms – and the hiring of staff to enforce these mechanisms. Or they can be perceived as part of a professionalisation process in which new (or redefined) roles are bestowed with a professional status equivalent to existing professions. From what we have observed, and which we try to depict through the concept of an accountability bureaucracy, all three factors are involved. While it is theoretically possible to associate all three factors and align them with some meta-narrative (such as 'neo-liberalism'), attempts to seek empirical validity will inevitably be more difficult. By way of example, is the employment of diversity, equity and inclusion administrators at a higher education institution an example of neo-liberal managerialism? We rather think that these officers perform a partly political job at the agency, even if it has not been explicitly demanded by political peers. This is why we want to frame the modern bureaucracy as an *accountability bureaucracy* where political direction, managerialism, and professional careers truly intermix in the formation of the accountable organisation, which also implies a mixture of internal and external forces.

### 7.3 COMPARING COUNTRIES

Although New Zealand and Sweden are both welfare states and parliamentary democracies of comparable size in terms of population and geography, there are also some notable differences. It is important to note that the two countries have no direct historical connections, although some respondents mentioned interactions with counterparts through international associations and events.

In terms of structures and functions, the most striking institutional difference lies at the subnational government levels. While local and regional government levels in New Zealand are basic and rudimentary, most of Sweden's welfare state is administered by subnational governments, which account for over 80 per cent of public sector employees. Furthermore, constitutional differences, which became particularly evident during the Covid-19 pandemic,

are significant. Sweden relies on relatively autonomous agencies that operate at arm's length from the Cabinet, whereas New Zealand's government is organised around individually responsible ministers with hierarchical command and reporting lines to agency boards and chief executives.

Despite these differences, there are some fascinating commonalities in our findings. Starting with the descriptive statistics, both public sectors have grown significantly during the 2000s after the downsizing in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Also, as we have already outlined, well-educated organisational professionals are the fastest-growing occupational category in both countries (with the caveat that our study in New Zealand mainly covers their public services), whereas traditional administrative support staff without academic degrees shrink or grow below average. Although there are some differences in categorisations between the two countries (the New Zealand category 'information professionals' has no direct counterpart in the Swedish workforce data), we can still make the general claim that internal organisational functions are prioritised within both public sectors.

What we can state with reasonable certainty is that the supply of individuals with generalist university degrees in certain disciplines (business studies, political science, and other social sciences) has grown considerably in both countries over recent decades. These individuals have supported a process of administrative professionalisation in both countries (although the police forces seem to be a bit behind in this process). In our study, this process has been particularly evident within the university sectors. In both countries, administrative *amateurism* prevailed until at least the 1980s. In contrast to the original Latin term *universitas*, which literally means an association (of faculties, scholars, and students), the modern university has evolved into a more coherent, unitary organisation. It is now less characterised by pluralism and more aligned with other modern public sector organisations that feature common mission statements, charters, functions, and probably most importantly, professional administrative support functions. This shift has led to the significant influx of new professional groups, either supplementing or replacing the existing 'hybrid academics'. Many of these new professionals have themselves graduated from these institutions.

A second important similarity is the comparable trajectories of the transport agencies, the police forces, and higher education institutions across the two countries. They share a history of evolving from relatively autonomous bodies into more professional and accountable organisations, increasingly shaped by the templates of modern public sector organisations. The evolution of the transport agencies mirrors the transition from large, operational construction enterprises to supply management and purchasing organisations. While there exist commonalities, the changes are asymmetric. The New Zealand reforms in the 1980s (and 1990s) reflected radical and early attempts to transform

sections of the public sector. The political system, and in particular the electoral system, at the time permitted deep and sweeping changes which probably would have been unthinkable following the changes to the electoral system (as part of the 1993 Electoral Act). But although the public sector reforms were radical at the time, pockets of old structures and organisations remained unchallenged. Meanwhile, the evolution in Sweden has been more incremental and less systemic but has caused more extreme shifts across the whole public sector, with very few areas of the public sector remaining untouched, although some of the internal tensions in the Swedish police force seem to reverberate around the issue of sworn police officers 'stealing' higher administrative jobs from organisational professionals.

Finally, the general attitude towards these changes varies between the two jurisdictions. While there is broad agreement that the far-reaching wave of managerialism in the public sector has had some negative unintended consequences, the discourses surrounding these changes are quite disparate. The Swedish respondents (including the organisational professionals themselves) largely expressed critical views about these changes in our interviews. By contrast, the New Zealand respondents (as a collective group) appeared to have more readily adapted to the context of a more 'corporate public service style' across the policy sectors and expressed fewer concerns. Even if the almost stereotypical classifications of New Zealand and Sweden as 'radical' vs 'cautious' reformers (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2002) nowadays are outdated, and even if the trajectories are different, the outcomes seem to be similar. There may remain relatively distinct patterns of values and beliefs within both countries' public sector entities and national civil services. Public sector organisations and their staff are committed to specific policy objectives and goals, which, in turn, shape their culture. While it was beyond the scope of our study to determine whether these cultural differences were primarily driven by national, sectoral, organisational, or occupational/professional factors, it was nonetheless something clearly noticeable in our empirical data. This finding is likely to be crucial for anyone studying comparative public administration. What may appear as a normative dilemma in one jurisdiction is not necessarily viewed as a problem in another.

## 7.4 THE NORMATIVE QUESTION

We have so far in this study tried to downplay the normative question of whether the bureaucratisation of the public sector should be conceived as something negative or not. As with the taxonomy literature on public sector reforms, there is a tendency in much of the literature on bureaucracy and the public sector to refer to a glorious past where professions maintained full autonomy and control over their operations, and where the standards and performance

were managed through internal professional processes without the intrusion of 'external' bureaucratic exercises. Needless to say, the historical evidence of such a 'Golden Age' is absent in the archives of the investigated organisations (which rather reveal excessively inflexible organisations). This Golden Age is frequently juxtaposed with how the public sector as a unified entity was victimised by a metaphysical force called NPM. This narrative is overly simplistic, with an abstract and faceless 'villain' that somehow restrain the 'heroic new leaders' attempts to move towards a 'new brave public service'. The mundane practice and operations of the public sector are very much the result of a mixture of different impulses, especially tensions between politics and administration, rather than the outcome of a single factor.

In terms of the literature on administrative intensity, our studies confirmed our initial view that simply studying the ratio between administrative and frontline staff, or organisational budgets, overlooks important nuances. In fact, had we taken a historical perspective on tallying or measuring administrative support, we would most likely have observed a decrease in administrative roles, as many traditional positions have been disestablished and replaced by technology. This is also where the classical occupational distinction between professional frontline workers and non-professional support staff is beginning to break down. What should be obvious by now is that administration is just as much a professional activity, requiring higher education and striving for professional recognition through accreditation, codes of conduct, and other characteristics typically associated with traditional professions. One might critique this development as a 'Triumph of Emptiness', in line with Alvesson (2013), but the fact remains that organisational professionals are gaining the much-sought-after professional recognition, which could very well lift them out of their traditionally subordinate 'support' role. As demonstrated in some of the quotes above, this professionalisation has, if not altered the power balance, at least shifted the power dynamics within public organisations. In particular, the new professional groups have formed alliances with organisational leadership.

Still, even if our endeavour has been an empirical one, our concept of accountability bureaucracy will be dealt with in a slightly more normative fashion in these final paragraphs. Accountability has become a central value in modern public administration, and this is also reflected in both the existing academic literature and among our respondents. Scholars have shown how an increased focus on accountability can transform staff from 'honest triers' into 'reactive gamers' (Bevan & Hood, 2006), highlighting the potentially 'dangerous' aspects of accountability (Messner, 2009). An alternative explanation for the growth of this trend is rooted in managerialism itself (Löfgren et al., 2022a). Modern public sector managers are subjected to accountability regimes, with KPIs setting targets for individual leaders (Moynihan, 2009). Beyond the fact that these targets can make individual leaders vulnerable,

meeting them often requires expertise in communication, performance management, human resources, marketing, and other areas. As a result, we are witnessing the creation of 'new bureaucratic entourages' whose primary purpose is to support and sustain the individual leader. These new cohorts also make it easier to play the 'blame game' (Hood, 2011), deflecting direct external criticism from the political principal or other stakeholders. It is also worth noting that an increased focus on accountability and performance does not necessarily lead to better outcomes. While this discrepancy is not often explored in the public administration literature, other political scholars have highlighted the gap between *performance* and *performativity*.

Performance is therefore frequently replaced by performativity, i.e. the repetitive enactment of specific forms of behaviour and capabilities, which are simply equated with the intended outcomes. The implications of this development are considerable. They affect not only the legitimacy but also the conceptualization, implementation and local experiences [...]. (Krahmann, 2017, pp. 54–55)

Ticking boxes, performance exercises, and reporting requirements just for the sake of demonstrating action are not very likely to achieve better standards of accountability. If accountability is reduced to basically performative acts, there is reason to question the expansion of accountability functions. And, as stated above, their performance is seldom monitored in the same way as core operations.

Second, although administrative *professionals* most likely demonstrate better work performances than administrative *amateurs*, there is a conceivable problem with organisational professionalism reconfiguring 'modern' organisations. The higher education sector represents an excellent example. In both countries, we have witnessed a professionalisation of the higher education administrative operations. This is viewed as a progressive step forward among those respondents who still remember the pre-managerial age. However, this expansion of a well-educated organisational professional cadre within universities and higher education institutions presents new problems. As stated in Chapter 6 about higher education, universities have traditionally been 'open' organisations with a professional and boundary-spanning academic ethos. This is most clearly visible in the research space where research networks are often horizontal, include actors from different institutions, and cross organisational boundaries. This contravenes the modern managerial loyalty to the organisation where one is employed. In such contexts, there is a risk that 'too much' organisation building leads to closed doors or reinforces the boundaries of the organisation. Furthermore, there does not seem to be any control – since all financial control is directed towards core operations, especially the production

of students – over the new administrative professionals and their operations in the higher education sector.

A third critical issue is why the academic literature has rarely addressed the historical changes in educational backgrounds within the public sector. Rather than solely focusing on an increased demand for generalists in the public sector, it is important to consider that *the supply* of generalists is a key factor. Unsurprisingly, these new cohorts of generalists often take up those positions we have labelled organisational professionals. While there is a rich literature on factors affecting recruitment and retention in the public sector – such as demographic factors (Wolf & Amirkhanyan, 2010), public service motivation (Andersen & Kjeldsen, 2013), recruitment and retention factors (Rehman, 2012) – the homogeneous background of these new troupes of organisational professionals remains notably overlooked in the literature. One harsh, yet probably accurate, reason for this oversight is that these generalist graduates in the public sector are the bread and butter for academic institutions. This stagnation may also help explain why the NPM narrative continues to prevail, despite its nebulous nature. It is easier to blame a metaphysical phenomenon than to acknowledge that the current trends in public administration are partly caused by the expansion of academic institutions.

Finally, we may return to the classical question of whether more bureaucrats are bad or good – particularly considering some of the events around the world at the time of writing this book, where ‘public servant bashing’ by both politicians and the media seems to be high on the political agenda. Perhaps unsurprisingly, we can conclude that this question can only be answered through the lens of context – in particular, the specific policy sector. In some of our cases (the Swedish police and higher education) the growth of new layers of organisational professionals is perceived to have created a dysfunctional multiplication of gatekeepers and authorising points negatively affecting existing professional cultures. In the New Zealand cases, the results are less clear-cut in the police case, and more pronounced in the university area (but not across all higher education institutions). The New Zealand historical attempt to install caps on public sector workers (and particularly communication officers) also seems to have backfired and created perverse effects with overuse of consultants and fixed-term contractors nominally reducing staff numbers, but inflating staff costs. Notwithstanding our different cases, it seems that the accountability bureaucracy’s mixture of politics and administration poses a risk when confronted with populist leaders such as Donald Trump and Elon Musk.

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