Open Competition for Faculty Fellowships

Application form 2008-2009

Centre for Comparative Social Studies
Faculty of Social Sciences, VU

(Note: As far as one of the following criteria is not applicable, please indicate why and supply alternative relevant information.)

1. Details of applicant
Name, title(s): Dr. Gjalt de Graaf
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Duration: -- Application for an additional 0.4 fte research time during six months /
0 Application for an additional 0.2 fte research time during one year

Discipline: Public Administration
Keywords: Loyalty, public servants, Q-methodology

2. Title of the application
The loyalties of public servants

3. Research proposal (3a + 3b = max 800 words)

3a. Problem statement and theoretical background

Much has been written recently on the ‘new’ and ‘professional’ public servant (Noordegraaf, Steen & Frissen, 2006) who enjoys much discretionary freedom. Partly influenced by the literature on New Public Management (Maesschalck, 2004), it is argued that public servants should make sure that citizens get ‘value for money’, must deliver quality, have to be more responsive, able to operate strategically, improve the reputation of their organizations, etc. (cf. Clarke & Newman, 1997; Noordegraaf, 2004; Pollitt & Boukaert, 2000). The images of the ‘new’ public servant clash with the classic images of the ‘old’ one (e.g., Weber, 1999): the public servant who neutrally carries out orders of elected politicians. Public servants these days seem to serve (many) more masters than just politicians. But are the interests of all their masters not contradictory? And if so, whose interests are most important? Are, for example, traditional administrative virtues in conflict with the emphasis on NPM and effectiveness (Macaulay & Lawton, 2006)?

To address the mentioned issues, the applicant started a research project which has as its first research question: Where do the loyalties of public servants lie? With colleagues, the ‘public good’, the own conscience, the own organization, the law, the client of the organization or the elected officials (Bovens, 1998: ch. 9 and 12; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000; Hart, 2002; Nieuwenkamp, 2001)? Probably the answer
to these questions is some mix of all possible loyalties, partly depending on the specific public servant the question is asked to. It can be expected that top public servants have different conceptions of their loyalties than street level bureaucrats (Selden, Brewer, & Brudney, 1999). What the exact mix constitutes, what different conceptions there are, and how these differ at different levels in government, is also studied in the project. The second research question is: How are the loyalties of public servants related to their gender, age, geographical location, and administrative level? The third research question is: “Do the answers to the first two research questions have consequences for the institutional design of the Dutch administrative system?”

Loyalty is here defined as “the willing and practical dedication of a person to a cause” (cf. Stoker, 2005: 273). Even though many different definitions exists, most organizational scholars agree about the following: the subject identifies with the object of loyalty (‘the cause’); there is an emotional tie with the object of loyalty; and the subject behaves in a way that promotes the interests of the object of loyalty (Fletcher, 1993). Loyalties are not merely ideational: they affect work and behavior in daily practices, mostly by prioritizing signals, issues and meetings (Fletcher, 1993). In this study, the concept of “loyalty” will be closely tied to the concepts of “responsibility” (e.g., Bovens 1998) and “role” (e.g., Selden et al., 1999).

### 3b. Method / Approach

The research project on the loyalties of public servants makes use of Q-methodology to collect and analyze data. A total of 120 public servants already Q-sorted and were interviewed about selected loyalty statements (based on an extensive literature study by the applicant). Six master students collected the data for their master thesis in which they reported about the loyalties of public servants. In the proposed Faculty Fellowship, the 120 Q-sorts and interviews will be analyzed for three groups of public servants: top level public servants at ministries (ABD/members), top public servants at a municipality level, and street level bureaucrats in municipalities. The analysis of the data will lead to different clusters of public servants who each prioritize loyalties differently (this will be done separately for the three mentioned groups of public servants). Additionally, it will be shown how each group conceptualizes the different pressures on their loyalty. Also the variables gender, age and geographical locations will be taken into account.

Q-methodology is very well suited to answer the research questions raised above, because the results of a Q-study are clusters that are functional, instead of logical. In other words, the clusters are not logically constructed by the researcher, they result from the empirical data; they are operant. See for example De Graaf (2005c), where the loyalties of veterinarians were studied. Contrary to traditional surveys, Q-study does not require a large number of respondents: “Whereas previously a large number of people were given a small number of tests, now we give a small number of people a large number of test-items.” (Stephenson, 1953); Q-methodology can reveal a characteristic independently of the distribution of that characteristic relative to other characteristics in a population.

Up to now, unique data was collected. For example, 62% of randomly selected ABD members (the highest ranked Dutch public servants) agreed to be interviewed.
The six students however, each collected just a small piece of the overall picture (twenty interviews each). This application asks for a Faculty Fellowship which is needed to:
- make a good statistical analysis of all the data that was collected
- make a good analysis of the 120 interviews
- do a more extensive literature study coupled with a good analysis of the Dutch administrative system
- write research reports.

4. Key publications relevant to the present proposal (3 - 5)


5. Time Plan (max ½ A4 or 100 words)

First, one more week is needed to further analyze the concept of loyalty, and its relationship to related concepts. Then a statistical analysis of the 120 Q-sorts is needed, resulting in different statistical factors. After that, the 120 interviews will be analyzed, to give meaning to the factors resulting from the statistical analysis. Then a week is planned to take a new look at the literature about institutional design and relate that to the answers of the first two research questions. With all that information, articles can be written and submitted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>hours</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literature study on key concepts</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doing Q-data statistical analysis</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Doing analysis of the interview material</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Additional literature and theoretical research</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing two international articles</td>
<td>130</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing two Dutch academic articles</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>320</strong></td>
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6. Relevance (scientific, societal; max 300 words)

The loyalties of public servants is a much discussed theme in the literature. However, most of the current research focus on the relationship between (top) public servants and elected politicians; the so-called “ambtelijke loyaliteit” is often discussed. In those discussions, other possible loyalties of servants are mentioned, more research on it is often called for, but it has never actually been researched in a Dutch setting. Petter (2005: 67): “For instance, do servants who evaluate subordinates based on hierarchical responsibility also emphasize other low-autonomy perspectives? Or do they balance it by also stressing an outcome focus, such as public responsibility? A Q-methodology study may reveal patterns.”

The proposal also fits with current discussions on the real influence of NPM (see 3a) on Dutch administration, a theme prominently researched in several Ph.D. theses coming out of the Public Administration research group this year.

The societal relevance became very clear after the first invitations were sent out by the students to interview to public servants: the Dutch Ministry of Interior showed immediate interest in the research. The applicant went to The Hague twice to have a meeting with the Director-General of the Ministry to discuss the proposal. Knowledge and insight on the different loyalty conceptions of our current public servants and the different ways in which they deal with pressures and demands from many different actors, will help with the institutional design of our administrative systems and help to make (re)organization decisions affecting the legitimacy of our government (e.g., should the loyalty lie with the elected public official or more with the public interest in general?). It will also be of use in the training of public servants at all levels.

7. Expected output and contributions (7a - 7d = max 500 words)

7a. Expected output

Q-methodology is not well known within our department, even though it is rapidly gaining ground in academic studies in general and social studies in particular. Since there is no space here to explain the method in detail, it is better to refer to the Sneak-preview the applicant (co-)wrote, which can be downloaded from his FSW webpage (URL at the top of this application). After having used the method for empirical studies on his Ph.D. project, the applicant has become a national expert on Q-methodology. On the 19th of October 2007 he gave a Q-course of one day to sixteen academics planning to use the method in their research. In a short period, he published eight articles in academic journals based on Q-methodology (Van Exel & De Graaf, 2007; Van Exel, De Graaf, & Rietveld, 2005; De Graaf, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2007; De Graaf, Brouwer, & Van Exel, 2006)(plus two more near-acceptances), including an article in a top Social Science journal with an impact score of 2.75 (Van Exel, De Graaf, & Brouwer, 2006).

The expected output of the proposed Fellowship is two international journal articles (the Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory is targeted for an article on the main data of this research) and two related Dutch scientific articles (Bestuurskunde and Bestuurswetenschappen are targeted). The publication record of the applicant in general (see his CV) and his record on Q publications in particular, show that these are more than reasonable goals.
Furthermore, it can be expected that the Dutch media will have an interest in the outcome of this study. This is why a clear protocol has been agreed with the Dutch Ministry of Interior on how to present the outcomes to the Dutch press.

7b. Contribution to the research program of the Department

As mentioned, it fits well with several Ph.D. research projects. It has ties to other research fields such as Political Science.

7c. Contribution to the research mission of the CCSS

This project is innovative and interdisciplinary, since it includes literature and theory from Sociology, Philosophy (e.g., a literature study on the concept of loyalty), Public Administration and Organizations Sciences.

Above all, the proposed project is comparative of nature. The project compares different organizations (the three mentioned earlier) and different types of public servants. The outcomes will also be compared to other international studies.

7d. Additional value

- What is the additional value of the proposal? Why is it not possible / would it be possible to conduct the proposed project within regular work time?
- Has the content of the proposal (similar subject matter) been submitted elsewhere? If yes, where?

If this proposal is not honoured, the applicant will have considerably more teaching responsibilities during 2007-2008 (he has a ‘normal’ full time Assistant Professor appointment, with a 0.6 fte teaching responsibility). Since there are also several other research projects within his research group he will take part in, it is clear that in the case that the Fellowship is not awarded, there will not be enough time to conduct the additional research that is needed to do the needed analysis to transform the unique data of this project into high quality articles that will be accepted in leading journals. Furthermore, in June 2008, the applicant will be organizing a large international conference in Amsterdam on Good Governance, leaving even less time to do research.

The proposal is not submitted anywhere else.

8. Replacement of applicant’s teaching obligations

Replacement of the applicant’s teaching obligations is stated in the attached letter by the Head of the Dept. of Organization & Management in Appendix A.

9. CV of applicant

(including publication record)

Please ad CV in Appendix B.

10. I hereby declare that I have completed this form truthfully:

Name: Gjalt de Graaf
Amsterdam, Date: 12-11-07
11. Literature references (max 1 A4)


(the applicant has a much longer list of relevant literature)