

Tilburg University

What councillors expect of facilitative mayors

Karsten, Niels

Published in:
Lex Localis

Publication date:
2019

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication in Tilburg University Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Karsten, N. (2019). What councillors expect of facilitative mayors: The desired leadership competencies in job advertisements for the Dutch mayoralty and how they are affected by municipal size. *Lex Localis*, 17(1), 179-199. <http://pub.lex-localis.info/index.php/LexLocalis/article/view/1106>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

What councillors expect of facilitative mayors

The desired leadership competencies in job advertisements for the Dutch mayoralty and how they are affected by municipal size

Dr. Niels Karsten MA

n.karsten@uvt.nl

Accepted manuscript

Karsten, N. (2019). What councillors expect of facilitative mayors: the desired leadership competencies in job advertisements for the Dutch mayoralty and how they are affected by municipal size. *Lex Localis*, 17(1), 177-197

Abstract

Job vacancy texts for the Dutch mayoralty provide original evidence about what councillors expect of facilitative mayors. In this article, we conduct an automated content analysis of 231 advertisements and use focus groups to interpret our results. We find that the desired qualities of mayoral candidates include showing morally appropriate behaviour, acting as a liaison within local government and beyond, as well as vigour, empathy, and communicative skill. Further, we find that municipal size does affect the desirability of leadership competencies, but also that its impact is limited. This finding suggests that desired local leadership qualities may be less context-dependent than previously assumed.

1 Introduction

The practical relevance of facilitative and collective mayoral leadership, as opposed to take-charge and individualistic leadership, is rising in importance (Greasley & Stoker, 2008). At the same time, this freshly-appreciated type of leadership remains underexplored in the public leadership literature, which continues to be dominated by a strong-man perspective (Crosby & Bryson, 2018; Schedlitzki, Case, & Knights, 2017). In this article, we provide an analysis of the Dutch mayoralty, which serves as an insightful case of this type of leadership (Karsten & Hendriks, 2017), from a unique perspective: we analyze the desired leadership qualities as they are expressed in job vacancy texts. In this way, we provide original evidence on what councillors expect of facilitative mayors.

The existence of job advertisement texts for mayors results from their atypical selection procedure. The fact that Dutch mayors, by constitutional law, are appointed by national government is already special. Most other mayors in Europe and beyond are either directly elected or selected by the municipal council (Heinelt, Magnier, Cabria, & Reynaert, 2018; Schaap, Daemen, & Ringeling, 2009a). In practice, though, Dutch councillors have a decisive vote in selecting their mayors in a way that is not altogether different from other council-elected mayors. What remains unique is that mayors in the Netherlands are selected through a public vacancy. All Dutch citizens under the age of 70 can apply for the mayoralty in any municipality where there is a vacancy. As a result of this selection procedure, the large

majority of mayors come from outside the municipality where they are appointed. Also, several Dutch mayors go from one municipality to the next, which is not very common in other countries either. In the selection procedure, the 'profile description' (in Dutch: *profielbeschets*) plays an important role. It describes the 'job requirements to be met by the person to be appointed as mayor' (Section 61, paragraph 2 Municipalities Act) and has the same function as a job vacancy text in other professions.

In politics, having such a written-down and public document that describes the desired characteristics of political executives is very uncommon since they are usually not selected in such a way (see also Hlynsdottir, 2016; Schaap et al., 2009a). The Dutch job vacancy texts thus provide a rare source of information about what councillors expect to see in new mayors. In this article, we analyze the content of 231 job vacancy texts for the Dutch mayoralty and describe the desired characteristics, leadership style and competencies for mayors in the Netherlands. We reflect on our findings through focus groups.

We believe there is a broader relevance to our findings since the more facilitative and less partisan leadership style that is typical for Dutch mayors is seen to be of increasing importance in other counties (Bjørnå & Mikalsen, 2015; Greasley & Stoker, 2008; Hlynsdottir, 2016; Teles, 2014). We believe, therefore, that a study of the expectations that Dutch councillors have of their mayors provides important information on contemporary trends in mayoral leadership in Europe and beyond. There are indeed contingencies but also important commonalities in the role and function of mayors that justify elaborating on the leadership traits of mayors as a group of professionals (see Heinelt et al., 2018). Further, existing studies have consistently show that selection procedures and the statutory position of the mayor do affect mayoral performance less than expected (Schaap, Daemen, & Ringeling, 2009b; Svara, 1995). And, crucially, we use our data to test the popular assumption that municipal size matters for the desired characteristics and leadership style of mayors since smaller and larger municipalities provide substantially different contexts for office holders to work in (Heinelt et al., 2018: 188; Yáñez, Magnier, & Ramírez, 2008).

2 The complex selection procedure for mayors in the Netherlands

In the selection of a mayor in the Netherlands, the municipal council plays a deciding role. But, the selection procedure is quite complex and requires some elaboration. The municipal council consists of directly elected representatives and constitutionally is the highest organ of local government in the Netherlands (Hendriks & Schaap, 2011). At the very end of the selection procedure, the council issues a formal recommendation to the Minister of the Interior, who then recommends the candidate for appointment by royal decree. The formal appointment is in the hands of the national government (Section 131 Constitution). This is referred to as the appointment by 'the Crown'. The local councils, however, do most of the work for the selection.

Once a vacancy opens up for the position of mayor in a Dutch municipality, from among its members, the municipal council selects a committee that prepares the selection. The composition of this committee is open, but it commonly consists of all the leaders of the

political parties in the council. Together, they prepare the local by-laws that guide the selection procedure and compose a draft profile description for the new mayor. The municipal council then consults with the King's Commissioner on the text for the profile because, by law, the latter oversees the selection procedure. Shortly after the consultation, by simple majority, the full municipal council decides on both the by-laws and the text for the profile and hands over the profile description to the King's Commissioner. The commissioner then asks the Minister of the Interior to open up the vacancy officially through publication in the national Gazette. The municipal nomination committee then has the obligation to assess the candidates. By law, it operates behind closed doors.

The vacancy and profile description are commonly communicated by the local authority and others through a variety of media channels. Candidates apply to the vacancy by addressing the King through the office the King's Commissioner, who first reviews their suitability for appointment and prepares a selection. This selection is then discussed with the nomination committee, which goes on to interview potential candidates. The nomination committee, however, is not bound to the King's Commissioner's initial selection and can invite additional applicants for an interview. Based on the interviews, the nomination committee writes a draft council recommendation that is then discussed with the full municipal council behind closed doors, after which the council votes in secrecy on the official recommendation to Minister of the Interior. The council recommends the names of two persons, ranked in order of preference. But, afterwards, only the name of the number-one candidate is made public in a council meeting that follows the official vote. The municipal council thus publicly nominates one person for the position of mayor in the municipality.

After this, the Minister of the Interior must, in principle, accept the council's recommendation and him or herself recommend the number-one candidate for appointment by royal decree. Formally, the minister can deviate from the council's preference and appoint another candidate if they consider that there are serious reasons to depart from the council's recommendation. In practice, since the instalment of the current procedure in 2001, this has never happened and it is unlikely to happen. Hence, in practice, the municipal council has the deciding vote in the selection of a new mayor (Karsten, Cachet, & Schaap, 2013). Such selection procedures are common throughout Europe (Schaap et al., 2009a), although council-elected mayors are often selected from among council members. The particularities of the Dutch selection procedure, however, produce unique data on what local councillors expect from new mayors in the form of profile descriptions.

3 The role and function of the profile description

For a number of reasons, the profile description plays a crucial role during and after the selection procedure. First, it contains a description of the context in which the new mayor will work, which enables candidates to consider whether they apply in a municipality that is suitable for them to work in. Second, the profile describes the job requirements to be met by the person to be appointed mayor, which play a crucial role in assessing the candidates. Third, by regulation, the text is used by the King's Commissioner to assess the suitability of candidates. Fourth, the municipal council is required to motivate its recommendation for

appointment in relation to the profile description. In addition, once a mayor has been appointed, the profile description is the official standard for evaluating the appointee's performance and for evaluating the reappointment of the mayor (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2017). In addition, existing research finds that 73% of Dutch mayors report that the profile description guides their day-to-day behaviour (Karsten, Schaap, Hendriks, Van Zuydam, & Leenknecht, 2014). Profile descriptions, therefore, cannot be ignored and their contents provides relevant information on the mayoralty.

In accordance with the official instructions for composing a profile description, which prescribes that the text specifies a number of 'executive competencies' for mayors (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2017), profile descriptions typically take a competency approach to the selection of candidates. For the purpose of this article, competencies are defined 'as sets of behaviours that are instrumental in the delivery of desired results or outcomes' (Bartram, 2005). Competency models provide insights into the core skills, abilities, and behaviours that are desired for a particular position. Such approaches have become widespread in human resource management in the public sector. One of their strengths is that they provide the possibility of linking a candidate's characteristics to the goals and strategies of the organization (Rodriguez, Patel, Bright, Gregory, & Gowing, 2002). This is also one of the ambitions of the profile description, which, according to the instruction, aims to determine the desired characteristics of the new mayor in relation to the challenges that the municipality faces and its ambitions (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2016: 22). The theory behind this approach is that it supports councillors in adapting their choices to the local circumstances. Such local tailoring and customization, in turn, is believed to improve the governance capacity of the municipality because it fosters the selection of candidates that fit with the local context and improves the responsiveness of the new mayor to the local environment (Jans, 2015). In addition, the competency approach aims to improve the discriminativeness of the vacancy; that is, its ability to meaningfully distinguish between more suitable and less suitable candidates, which is a crucial function of a recruitment and selection process (Sparrow, 1995).

The role and function of the profile description and the considerable discretion that local governments have in composing it, suggests that we can expect to see substantial local customization (Jans, 2015). And, since 'municipal size captures crucial aspects of the context in which individual mayors live and work' and existing studies find substantial differences between smaller and larger municipalities that impact the work of the mayor (Vetter, Heinelt, & Rose, 2018), we expect to see substantial differences in the desired competencies for mayors in municipalities of different sizes.

Such an assumption ties in well with the long-standing observation that extensive leadership research has failed to provide a definitive list of traits that could be attributed to great leaders. Alternatively, it is widely believed that a contingency approach is more suitable for the study of leadership in general and also local political leadership (Ammons & Newell, 1989: 20; Hernandez, Eberly, Avolio, & Johnson, 2011). Such studies, which analyze what traits are important for leaders to have under various social and political conditions, are of crucial importance to the study of local executive leadership and tie in with a long tradition also as

regards mayoral leadership (e.g., DuBrin, 2013; Hajer, 2009; John & Cole, 1999; Svava, 1994; Vogel & Masal, 2015). This literature consistently shows that effective leadership skills are context-dependent, which again justifies the expectation that there will be substantial differences between profile descriptions for Dutch mayors.

Municipal size is commonly seen to be a key factor in this respect, with the number of inhabitants of a municipality affecting the leadership style of mayors (Heinelt et al., 2018; Keating, 1995). Larger municipalities, for example, provide more incentives and opportunities for contact between local government and businesses (Yáñez et al., 2008). Our expectations is that such contextual differences translate also into councillors from municipalities of different sizes expressing different leadership desires for new mayors.

Job texts for the Dutch mayoralty, however, are often criticized for being too generic and too homogenous and lacking discriminatory power, which would make them less suitable as a selection instrument (see Rodriguez et al., 2002; Sparrow, 1995). The following quote from Korsten provides a clear illustration: 'Profile descriptions are like garbage cans where everyone throws something in. They fail to make real choices or to set priorities' (in Gibbels, 2013; see also Korsten, 2010). In addition, Jans (2015) observes that, for a variety of reasons, local governments in the Netherlands often do not use their discretion to its full potential and that local policy customization is less common than expected. If this also applies to profile descriptions, we can expect to see more similarities between them.

The research on profile descriptions for mayors, however, has remained underdeveloped. Ever since Bovens (1983) studied their role in the selection process decades ago, when the role of the municipal council in the nomination was still very minimal, with the exception of one or two sketchy overviews (e.g., Korsten, 2010), no research has been conducted on them. We believe this is a missed opportunity.

4 A competency model for Dutch mayors

The official instructions for composing a profile description do not prescribe what councillors should expect of a new mayor, but they do provide guidelines on what choices to make and how to make choices that have considerable discriminatory power as to be able to select suitable candidates. The document that was used during our research period described a three-part competencies model that distinguished core characteristics, leadership style, and competencies (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2007). In this section, we will elaborate on these three and develop our hypotheses.

Core characteristics

First, the instruction names six 'core characteristics' that all office holders are expected to have. These include: (a) integrity, which is the quality of showing normatively appropriate conduct (Huberts, 2018), (b) immunity of stress, which is the ability to cope effectively with tension (c) independence, which is the ability to operate at a distance from party politics, (d) context-sensitivity, which is the ability to pick up on relevant changes in one's social or political environment, (e) identification, which is the ability to easily identify with others and to be

identified with, and (f) liaison capacity, which is the ability to bring people together across societal and institutional boundaries (see also Karsten & Hendriks, 2017).

A simple misunderstanding is that these six core characteristics are not meant to be discriminative since the thought behind them is that they are necessary for all mayors to have. Indeed, they are not meant to distinguish between one mayor and another. They are, however, meant to distinguish between more and less suitable candidates and therefore have a crucial role in the selection of candidates (see Sparrow, 1995).

Since the official instruction holds that all applicants suitable for appointment should possess these six core characteristics irrespective of the context they operate in, it can be assumed that municipal size does not affect their occurrence in profile descriptions from smaller and larger municipalities. From this expectation, we derive hypothesis 1:

H1: The six core characteristics for Dutch mayors are equally common in profile descriptions from municipalities of different sizes.

Leadership style

Second, the instruction distinguishes four leadership styles and recommends councillors to choose one of those for their new mayor. For its typology of leadership styles, the instruction takes Quinn and other's (2003) competing values model as a starting point, which contrasts leaders that (a) have an internal orientation to those that have an external orientation, and (b) leaders that are more flexible to those that want to be in control more. In juxtaposition, these two dimensions produce a two-by-two matrix that distinguishes four leadership styles. The resulting competing values instrument has received consistent and firm support (e.g., Kalliath, Bluedorn, & Gillespie, 1999). Admittedly, the Dutch ministry's interpretation of the competing values model was a rather loose one since it did not use the underlying questionnaire. Alternatively, it distinguishes the leadership styles as they are outlined in figure 1 (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2007).

Figure 1. Four leadership styles in the Dutch ministry's interpretation of the competing values framework

<i>Flexibility</i>	Liaison	Networker
<i>Control</i>	Director	Achiever
	<i>Internal orientation</i>	<i>External orientation</i>

Since powerful and decisive leadership is taken to be uncommon in the Netherlands, we can expect most profile descriptions to select a leadership style from the top half of the figure. In addition, for two reasons, we expect profile descriptions in smaller municipalities to desire a stronger internal orientation. First, the importance and the degree of external networking by mayors is seen to be higher in larger municipalities (Munck, 2016; Yáñez et al., 2008). Second, survey and calendar studies show that Dutch mayors in smaller municipalities spend less time

on their contact with civil society organizations and businesses and more on the internal administrative matters in the local administration (Karsten et al., 2014: 39), in part because they are often the only fulltime executive. From these findings, we derive hypothesis 2:

H2: Liaison and director leadership styles are more common in profile descriptions from smaller municipalities than networker and achiever leadership styles.

Competencies

Third, the instruction for composing a profile description distinguishes 20 'administrative competencies' that councillors may expect mayors to have. These are more concrete skills and behaviours than the more abstract leadership styles and include, e.g., decisiveness, perseverance, and innovation capacity. Since the list that is provided is quite extensive, there is no room here to discuss all competencies. But, the popular assumption that smaller and larger municipalities offer very different context for mayors to work in suggests that there are at least some competencies that are sought after more in smaller municipalities than in larger municipalities. For example, given the importance of external networking for larger municipalities (Yáñez et al., 2008), we expect related competences such as communicative and negotiation skills to be more important in municipalities that have a higher number of inhabitants. This expectation finds additional support in the observation that the tasks and responsibilities of mayors in municipalities of different sizes vary (Karsten et al., 2014). To increase the readability of our analysis as regards competencies, we start from the null hypothesis that municipal size does not affect the desired competencies in profile descriptions.

H3 (null hypothesis): The 20 leadership competencies are equally common in profile descriptions from smaller and larger municipalities.

5 Research strategy and methods

For the current study, we have conducted a quantitative text analysis of 231 job vacancy texts for Dutch mayors. This method is quite common in research that aims to describe the features of and skills requirements for a particular profession, including that of engineers (Hong, 2016), managers (Varje, Anttila, & Väänänen, 2013), and librarians (Henricks & Henricks-Lepp, 2014). It is also used to study various understandings of leadership (e.g., Brodbeck & Frese, 2008; Den Hartog, Caley, & Dewe, 2007). As a result, the methodology has become quite established (Harper, 2012). For the lack of such documents, in the realm of politics, however, the analysis of job advertisements is almost non-existent, which underlines the relevance of the current study.

Since the official instruction for composing profile descriptions that is covered by our study was valid between 2008 and 2015, we first identified all mayors that were appointed in the Netherlands between 01-01-2008 and 31-12-2016 and then determined whether the vacancy text had been formalized within the period of validity. As a result, we identified 266 valid profile descriptions. Then, we searched for the actual texts via the internet and through contact with municipal administrations. In this way, we collected 251 profile descriptions. The

remaining 15 could not be retrieved. Out of the profile descriptions we collected, 231 were suitable for automated content analysis. This means that we have analyzed 86% (231/266) of all vacancy text that have been produced over the course of the research period. One of the strengths of our approach is that it did not require sampling, which is seen to be a common weakness in this type of study (Harper, 2012), since we only excluded unavailable or unsuitable texts.

In accordance with Harper's (2012) recommendations, we conducted an automatic text analysis. We used the Textstatt and WordSmith software tools. Depending on the method, either 231 or 217 texts were suitable for analysis. To avoid the risks of interpretation as much as possible, we used our software to identify mentions of the specific words from the official instruction and/or direct linguistic equivalents. The software also took into account negative phrasings, such as 'we are not looking for an achiever', which were excluded from the analysis. As a consequence, there was no need for the researchers to determine whether a specific text fragment related to any of the core characteristics, leadership styles or competencies. Susceptibility to such interpretation risks is one of the common weaknesses in job advertisements analyses (Harper, 2012). One of the implications of this approach is that we report only on explicit mentions of the core characteristics, leadership styles or competencies, and ignore implicit ones. This is one of the limitations of our study, but we believe the increased reliability outweighs the disadvantage.

We assigned a value of 0 or 1 to the absence or presence of a term. Thus, we report on the mentioning of core characteristics, leadership styles and competencies on the level of profile descriptions. This present-absent basis for coding means that we do not attach a relative weight to a term when it is used in a text more often than once. This is because we aimed to compare vacancy texts and municipalities on an equal basis. Implementing Harper's (2012) recommendations, we use inferential statistics -Chi-square tests-, to determine whether municipal size matters for the desired characteristics of mayors. For our classification of municipal sizes, we use the broadly accepted demarcations of Statistics Netherlands.

Following recommendations by Harper (2012) again, we also use complementary empirical methods to interpret our findings. The results of the quantitative analysis were discussed in five separate focus groups with the main target groups of the official instructions: municipal council registrars, councillor-chairs of nomination committees, other council-members of nomination committees, mayors, and other relevant actors, including aldermen and clerks. The invitations to these meetings aimed at proportional representation across municipal sizes, political parties and provinces. In total, 55 people participated. In addition, we discussed our results with two individual chiefs of staff to King's Commissioners.

6 Results

In this section, we describe our findings as regards the desired core characteristics, leadership style, and competencies for Dutch mayors. We also analyze the effect of municipal size. The section goes on to discuss plausible explanations for the considerable homogeneity that we found.

Core characteristics

As table 1 indicates, our results show that the large majority of profile descriptions contains one or more of the six core characteristics.

Table 1. Core characteristics in job vacancy texts for Dutch mayors

	Total	<10.001	10.001- 20.000	20.001- 50.000	50.001- 100.000	100.000+
Integrity	79%	60%	74%	83%	85%	72%
Liaison capacity	65%	47%	70%	71%	48%	61%
Independence	59%	47%	58%	64%	45%	61%
Identification	59%	53%	56%	64%	45%	61%
Immunity to stress	58%	47%	60%	63%	42%	61%
Context-sensitivity	51%	47%	44%	58%	36%	56%
Average # of characteristics.	3,7	3,0	3,6	4,0	3,0	3,7
Number of texts	217	15	43	108	33	18

On average, a profile description contains 3.7 core characteristics. Of the six, integrity is clearly the most desired quality of new mayors since it is included in 79% of the texts. This finding reaffirms the vital importance of showing normatively appropriate conduct for Dutch mayors, who in survey research indicate that integrity is the most important good-governance value in their day-to-day work (Karsten et al., 2014). Given the bridging-and-bonding type of leadership that Dutch mayors typically exercise (Karsten & Hendriks, 2017), the fact that 'liaison capacity' scores high is not a surprise either. Although all of them can be found in more than half of the texts, other core characteristics are mentioned less often. Whereas Korsten et al. (2012), for example, see context-sensitivity as a crucial skill for Dutch mayors, the term appears in only 51% of the profile descriptions we examined.

Our focus groups reveal that the reasons why councillors leave out some core characteristics are at least twofold. First, even though they expect a candidate to have all six qualities, some councillors believe some core characteristics are more important to emphasize than others. Second, councillors and registers in particular are of the opinion that, unlike the other five characteristics, context-sensitivity is a skill that can be taught and that, therefore, is a competence rather than a core characteristic – for which reason they decide to leave it out.

As regards the answer to the question of whether or not to include the core characteristics in job vacancy texts, our focus groups reveal that there are three types of opinions. One is that they should be included since they are used to assess the suitability of candidates for appointment and, therefore, are a vital part of the selection instrument. A second line of argument is that they should *not* be included since they are not used to distinguish more suitable candidates from less suitable candidates. A third type of opinion holds that councillors should be free in choosing individual core characteristics that they would like to be emphasized. The absence of a core competence, thus, does not necessarily imply that councillors believe it is not relevant.

In accordance with hypothesis 1, a likelihood Chi-square test indicates that there are no significant differences between municipalities of different sizes as regards the inclusion of the six core characteristics. This finding supports the conviction that they are desired qualities for all mayors, irrespective of the context in which they will end up working in.

Leadership styles

Our text analysis shows that 84% of the profile descriptions mentions at least one of the four leadership styles that are in the instruction. When looking at the occurrence of the exact words 'liaison', 'networker', 'achiever', and 'director', on average, a profile description contains 1.6 leadership styles. Given the official instruction to preferably choose only one of the four styles, this number is quite high.

Table 2 shows that councillors have a strong preference for mayors that, according to the Quinn et al.'s (2003) competing values model, are more flexible and less control-minded. In total, 64% of profile descriptions indicates that councillors look for a liaison and 59% asks for a networker. The achiever and director leadership styles are sought after substantially less. Of the 231 profile descriptions, 4.3% asks for an achiever or a director only. This finding fits well with Karsten and Hendriks' (2017) observation that the leadership style of Dutch mayors typically is not of the decisive type.

Table 2. Leadership styles in job vacancy texts for Dutch mayors

	Total	<10.001	10.001- 20.000	20.001- 50.000	50.001- 100.000	100.000+
Liaison	64%	50%	65%	68%	53%	72%
Networker	59%	56%	65%	62%	47%	50%
Achiever	27%	38%	20%	30%	35%	6%
Director	10%	13%	7%	12%	6%	6%
<i>Average number of styles</i>	<i>1.6</i>	<i>1.6</i>	<i>1.6</i>	<i>1.7</i>	<i>1.4</i>	<i>1.3</i>
<i>Number of texts</i>	<i>231</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>117</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>18</i>

In addition, councillors do not seem to be very inclined to choose between a liaison and a networker; that is, between a new mayor that has an external orientation and a mayor that has an internal orientation. Whereas the competing values framework suggests that these are opposing leadership styles, no less than 100 profile descriptions, or 43%, ask for both a networker and a liaison. And, out the profile descriptions that mention more than one leadership style, 76% asks for a networker and 70% for a liaison. These findings indicate that councillors often prefer their mayor to act as a liaison both within local government as well as between the local administration and other organizations. This result is in accordance with what existing studies find (e.g., Karsten et al., 2014; Korsten et al., 2012). Our focus groups corroborate this interpretation too.

In contrast to the expectation that was expressed in hypothesis 2, a Pearson Chi-square test shows that there are no significant differences between municipalities of different sizes as regards desired leadership style. This finding means that smaller municipalities do not ask for

different leadership styles than larger municipalities, or vice versa. The more internal orientation of mayors that was found in other studies thus does not seem to be the result of what councillors ask of office holders at the start of their term of office.

All in all, the desired leadership styles for Dutch mayors as expressed by councillors are relatively homogenous. This finding challenges Van der Steen and De Jong's (2015) postulate that there is considerable variety in the leadership style of Dutch mayors. But, it ties in nicely with Karsten et al.'s (2014) earlier observation that both the role orientations and the demographic composition of the mayoral corps in the Netherlands show very little variation. One might even postulate that the strong homogeneity among Dutch mayors in terms of their role orientation may very well be the result of the small variation in the desired leadership styles as expressed by councillors when they look for a new mayor. After all, what you look for might well be what you find.

When we use our software to include not only the exact wording for the four leadership styles but also linguistic variations of the original terms, the desired leadership styles become even more homogeneous. As table 3 indicates, we find that 89% and 83% of the profile descriptions indicate that councillors look for a liaison and a networker, respectively. The achiever and director, in turn, continue to be sought after substantially less. Here too, using a Pearson Chi-square test, we find no significant differences between municipalities of different sizes.

Table 3. Leadership styles variations in job vacancy texts for Dutch mayors

	Total	<10.001	10.001- 20.000	20.001- 50.000	50.001- 100.000	100.000+
Variations of *Liaison*	89%	75%	89%	88%	91%	100%
Variations of *Networker*	83%	75%	80%	86%	77%	89%
Variations of *Achiever*	31%	38%	26%	31%	35%	28%
Variations of *Director*	21%	31%	20%	23%	18%	11%
<i>Average number of styles</i>	2.24	2.19	2.15	2.28	2.21	2.28
<i>Number of texts</i>	231	16	46	117	34	18

Competencies

The third part of the official instruction for composing a profile description discusses 20 'administrative competencies' that councillors may believe to be relevant for Dutch mayors. With the intention of motivating councillors to make clear choices in this respect, the document recommends the inclusion of a maximum of five of those in the vacancy text.

Our text analysis reveals that 90% of the text includes one or more of these 20 competencies in the wording of the instruction. On average, a profile description contains 3.3 competencies, which indicates that councillors are even more selective in this respect than is prescribed. In addition, we see quite a bit of diversity. Over all, with these being included in slightly less than half of the vacancy texts, vigour, empathy, and communicative skill are the most sought-after competencies. As table 4 shows, councillors thus expect candidates in particular to engage energetically with their role as a mayor, to identify with the feelings of others and to be communicable.

Table 4. Competencies in job vacancy texts for Dutch mayors

	Occurrence in % of texts	<10.001	10.001- 20.000	20.001- 50.000	50.001- 100.000	100.000+
Vigour	46%	20%	49%	52%	39%	39%
Empathy	44%	40%	35%	54%	39%	22%
Communicative skill	43%	33%	33%	54%	36%	28%
Administrative						
sensitivity	33%	20%	28%	38%	33%	22%
Situational awareness	31%	27%	26%	38%	33%	6%
Sociability	22%	20%	23%	23%	18%	22%
Negotiation skill	21%	27%	33%	22%	6%	6%
Decisiveness	19%	7%	23%	21%	15%	11%
Innovation capacity	16%	13%	7%	20%	15%	17%
Perseverance	11%	20%	9%	8%	15%	11%
Organizational						
sensitivity	10%	13%	14%	9%	12%	0%
Purposeful	8%	7%	7%	10%	9%	0%
Ability to judge	7%	0%	7%	7%	9%	6%
Coaching skill	6%	7%	5%	7%	3%	6%
Problem clarification						
skill	4%	7%	2%	5%	3%	6%
Adaptiveness	4%	7%	5%	3%	3%	6%
Monitoring	3%	7%	0%	6%	0%	0%
Tenaciousness	2%	0%	0%	4%	3%	0%
Willingness to keep						
asking	1%	0%	2%	2%	0%	0%
Power to influence	0%	7%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<i>Average number of skills</i>	3.3	2.8	3.1	3.8	2.9	2.1
<i>Number of texts</i>	217	15	43	108	33	18

Most of what we find in his respect fits well with the typical role and function of Dutch mayors. The fact that mayors, for example, are not expected to have considerable power to influence others ties in with the observation that decisive leadership is commonly not appreciated in the Netherlands (Karsten & Hendriks, 2017). Empathy and communicative skill, in contrast, fit well with their bridging-and-bonding leadership style. In part, the number-one ranking of vigour took us by surprise since the original Dutch term of *'daadkracht'* seems to suggest a type of decisive leadership. The focus group discussions, however, reveal that the term is not taken to describe mayors' abilities to achieve results. In contrast, the term is taken to describe mayors' ability to act quickly and energetically if the situation so requires.

As expected, in contrast with null hypothesis H3, we find significant differences between municipalities of different sizes as regards the desired competencies for Dutch mayors. A

likelihood Chi-square test indicates that communicative skills are more important in municipalities that have 20.001-50.000 inhabitants than in other municipalities (Cramér's $V=0.213$, $p=.042$), which may be related to the increased importance of external networking in such municipalities. In these same municipalities, councillors also value empathy more (Cramér's $V=0.208$, $p=.046$) as well as situational awareness (Cramér's $V=0.200$, $p=.034$). In municipalities that have more than 100.000 inhabitants, in turn, the later competency is seen to be less important. In contrast to our original expectation, negotiation skills are deemed to be more important in smaller municipalities than in larger municipalities (Cramér's $V=0.225$, $p=.013$), which might be explained by the fact that in regional networks smaller municipalities are more dependent on others.

Thus, municipal size affects the relevance of two top-three competencies as well as a few others. This finding corroborates the existing literature's postulate that municipalities of different sizes provide different contexts for mayors to work in. At the same time, all effect sizes are small. In addition, according to our data, the desirability of 16 out of these 20 competencies remains unaffected by municipal size.

Explaining homogeneity

When discussing the considerable homogeneity that we found regarding the desired leadership styles and, to a lesser extent, the leadership competencies for Dutch mayors, our analysis and focus group discussions reveal at least four plausible explanations. First, profile descriptions typically list the desired qualities of a new mayor without relating them to the local context and the challenges that a municipality is facing. Whereas the possibility of relating the two is one of the strengths of competency models (Rodríguez et al., 2002) and is also the intention of the official instruction, councillors typically describe them separately. Our focus groups reveal that one of the reasons for this is that councillors are not very inclined to wash their dirty linen in public in a publicly available vacancy text and prefer to paint a favourable picture of their municipality. As a consequence, vacancy texts may be more likely to describe the ideal mayor, which requires less local tailoring and customization (see also Jans, 2015). Second, we observe processes of normative isomorphism that result from the official instruction (see DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). As a result of the ministry's recommendations, which guide the decision-making process, the vacancy texts become more alike. Third, we observe processes of mimetic isomorphism since our focus groups reveal that councillors sometimes copy phrases that they find in existing profile descriptions to their own municipality's vacancy text (see DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). In this way, municipalities can learn from each other (Jans, 2015), but it might also indicate that councillors are sometimes somewhat idle when composing a vacancy text. The most influential explanation, however, seems to be a fourth one: a majority of participants to our discussions suggests that the expectations that councillors have of new mayors are simply quite similar. As such, it may be the role and function of the Dutch mayor in local government itself that causes uniformity. Consequently, profile descriptions may not be very dissimilar from each other, but they may be very different from job vacancies texts in other professions and may very well be able to meaningfully distinguish between more and less suitable candidates (see Rodríguez et al., 2002; Sparrow, 1995).

7 Conclusion and discussion

For the current study, we have conducted an automated content analysis of 231 job vacancy texts for the Dutch mayoralty, which provide unique evidence on what councillors expect from mayors. In this way, we provide an original perspective on what contemporary mayoral leadership looks like at a time when more facilitative and less partisan styles are often favoured (Greasley & Stoker, 2008). We find that the desired qualities of mayoral candidates include, in particular, showing morally appropriate behaviour, acting as a liaison within local government and beyond, as well as vigour, empathy, and communicative skill. Further, we find that municipal size does affect the desirability of a number of leadership competencies, but that desired core characteristics and leadership styles do not vary with municipal size. The existing literature's postulate that municipalities of different sizes provide very different context for mayors to work in is, thus, corroborated only in part. To some extent, our findings can be explained by isomorphic processes, but a more powerful explanation seems to be the fact that the expectations that councillors have of new mayors are in fact quite similar.

We believe that our findings have a broader relevance for other countries because our findings challenge the popular assumption that the local context – municipal size in particular – substantially affects the desired leadership style of mayors (see Heinelt et al., 2018; Yáñez et al., 2008). This finding suggests that the importance of facilitative-leadership qualities may be less context-dependent than previously assumed and that they are sought after more throughout local government (Greasley & Stoker, 2008; Heinelt et al., 2018). In addition, the Dutch case shows that a very important aspect of this type of leadership is the ability of mayors to act as a liaison within the local authority but also between the local authority and other actors outside the 'core organization' (O'Toole, 2010). Whereas such internal and external orientations may contrast with each other theoretically (Quinn et al., 2003), and can be expected to vary with municipal size (Yáñez et al., 2008), Dutch mayors are expected to have both irrespective of the number of inhabitants. Further, as with the Dutch mayor, non-partisan independence is often valued in mayors in other countries as well (Greasley & Stoker, 2008; Kukovic, Copus, Hacek, & Blair, 2015; Steyvers, 2016; Wollmann, 2014). Our findings, therefore, may well be less context-specific than the unique selection procedure suggests and, in particular, may be of relevance to other council-elected mayors.

Admittedly, 'job adverts only represent a small part of the phenomenon being investigated' (Harper, 2012: 45) in terms of the expectations that councillors have of candidates and how they affect the selection of those who are suitable for appointment. The fact that important parts of the selection of mayors in the Netherlands take place behind closed doors adds to the fact that it is rather difficult to unearth the details of the selection process. Further, profile descriptions are the product of a collective body that needs to reach a majority agreement on the final text, which makes it difficult to identify the preferences of individual councillors. Nevertheless, profile descriptions provide original data on the desired qualities of mayors, which offers relevant information on the profession and the context in which mayors operate. Also, profile descriptions have a crucial role in the selection of candidates and for the day-to-day work of mayors, and for this reason they cannot be ignored.

Given the profound transformations that local political leadership has gone through in Europe and beyond (Berg & Rao, 2005; Borraz & John, 2004; Steyvers, 2016), further research could usefully identify the expectations that mayors face nowadays in other countries. The uniqueness of job vacancy texts for the mayoralty, however, prevents us from conducting an international comparative study that uses similar data. Alternatively, further research could investigate whether and how citizens' expectations of mayors deviate from councillors' expectations. As yet, with exceptions (e.g., Hlynsdottir, 2016; Kukovic et al., 2015), information on citizen expectations is still rare. Such research could usefully identify the desired and contemporary leadership qualities of mayors in different societal and institutional contexts.

The current study contributes to this line of research by identifying the desired leadership competencies for Dutch mayors and by showing that these may be more uniform than the existing literature suggests, with municipal size having limited impact only. Our findings have the potential to contribute to the crucial understanding of what the emerging facilitative and less partisan forms of mayoral leadership look like in Europe and beyond.

References

- Ammons, D. N., & Newell, C. (1989) *City executives: leadership roles, work characteristics, and time management* (Albany: Suny Press).
- Bartram, D. (2005) The Great Eight competencies: a criterion-centric approach to validation. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 90*(6), pp. 1185-1203.
- Berg, R., & Rao, N. (eds.) (2005) *Transforming political leadership in local government* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).
- Bjørnå, H., & Mikalsen, K. H. (2015) Facilitative leadership revisited: the case of Norway. *Lex Localis - Journal of Local Self-Government, 13*(4), pp. 953-972.
- Borraz, O., & John, P. (2004) The transformation of urban executive leadership in Western Europe. *Urban and Regional Research, 28*(1), pp. 107-120.
- Bovens, M. A. P. (1983) *Wie het profiel past: een analyse van tien jaar inspraak van de gemeenteraad bij de benoeming van de burgemeester* (Deventer: Kluwer).
- Brodbeck, F. C., & Frese, M. (2008) Societal culture and leadership in Germany, In: J. S. Chhokar, F. C. Brodbeck, & R. J. House (eds.), *Culture and leadership across the world: the GLOBE book of in-depth studies of 25 societies* (New York: Routledge), pp. 147-214.
- Crosby, B. C., & Bryson, J. M. (2018) Why leadership of public leadership research matters: and what to do about it. *Public Management Review, 20*(9), pp. 1265-1286.
- Den Hartog, D. N., Caley, A., & Dewe, P. (2007) Recruiting leaders: an analysis of leadership advertisements. *Human resource management journal, pp. 17*(1), 58-75.
- DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1991) *The new institutionalism in organizational analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- DuBrin, A. J. (2013) Personal attributes and behaviors of effective crisis leaders, In: A. J. DuBrin (ed.), *Handbook of research on crisis leadership in organizations* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar), pp. 3-22.
- Gibbels, M. (2013) 'Profiel schets nieuwe burgemeester is als een vuilnisbak'. Retrieved from <http://destadutrecht.nl/politiek/profiel-schets-nieuwe-burgemeester-is-als-een-vuilnisbak/>
- Greasley, S., & Stoker, G. (2008) Mayors and urban governance: developing a facilitative leadership style. *Public Administration Review, 68*(4), pp. 722-730.
- Hajer, M. A. (2009) *Authoritative governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Harper, R. (2012) The collection and analysis of job advertisements: a review of research methodology. *Library and Information Research, 36*(112), pp. 29-54.
- Heinelt, H., Magnier, A., Cabria, M., & Reynaert, H. (2018) *Political leaders and changing local democracy: the European mayor* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan).
- Hendriks, F., & Schaap, L. (2011) The Netherlands: subnational democracy and the reinvention of tradition, In: J. Loughlin, F. Hendriks, & A. Lidström (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of local and regional democracy in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 96-119.
- Henricks, S. A., & Henricks-Lepp, G. M. (2014) Desired characteristics of management and leadership for public library directors as expressed in job advertisements. *Journal of Library Administration, 54*(4), pp. 277-290.

- Hernandez, M., Eberly, M. B., Avolio, B. J., & Johnson, M. D. (2011) The loci and mechanisms of leadership: exploring a more comprehensive view of leadership theory. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 22(6), pp. 1165-1185.
- Hlynsdottir, E. (2016) Leading the locality: Icelandic local government leadership dilemma. *Lex Localis - Journal of Local Self-Government*, 14(4), pp. 807–826.
- Hong, J. E. (2016) Identifying skill requirements for GIS positions: a content analysis of job advertisements. *Journal of Geography*, 115(4), pp. 147-158.
- Huberts, L. (2018) Integrity: what it is and why it is important? *Public Integrity* (ahead-of-print)
- Jans, W. (2015) *Policy innovation in Dutch municipalities* (Enschede: University of Twente).
- John, P., & Cole, A. (1999) Political leadership in the new urban governance: Britain and France compared. *Local Government Studies*, 25(4), pp. 98-115.
- Kalliath, T. J., Bluedorn, A. C., & Gillespie, D. F. (1999) A confirmatory factor analysis of the competing values instrument. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 59(1), pp. 143-158.
- Karsten, N., Cachet, A., & Schaap, L. (2013) The Dutch anomaly: appointed mayors; can appointed mayors cope with role changes and societal demands? *Lex Localis - Journal of Local Self-Government*, 11(2), pp. 177-192.
- Karsten, N., & Hendriks, F. (2017) Don't call me a leader, but I am one: the Dutch mayor and the tradition of bridging-and-bonding leadership in consensus democracies. *Leadership*, 13(2), pp. 154-172.
- Karsten, N., Schaap, L., Hendriks, F., Zuydam, S. van, & Leenknecht, G.-J. (2014) *Majesteitelijk en magistratelijk: de Nederlandse burgemeester en de staat van het ambt* (Tilburg: Tilburg University).
- Keating, M. (1995) Size, efficiency and democracy: consolidation, fragmentation and public choice, In: D. Judge, G. Stoker, & H. Wolman (eds.), *Theories of urban politics* (London: Sage), pp. 117-134.
- Korsten, A. F. A. (2010) Gedwongen vertrek van burgemeesters. *Justitiële Verkenningen*, 36(3), pp. 10-30.
- Korsten, A. F. A., Schoenmaker, M., Bouwmans, H., & Resoort, A. (2012) *Onder burgemeesters: finesses van het burgemeesterschap* (Den Haag: Boom Lemma).
- Kukovic, S., Copus, C., Hacek, M., & Blair, A. (2015) Direct mayoral elections in Slovenia and England: traditions and trends compared. *Lex Localis - Journal of Local Self-Government*, 13(3), pp. 697-714.
- Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. (2007) *Handreiking benoemingsproces burgemeesters* (The Hague: Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations).
- Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. (2016) *Handreiking burgemeesters: benoeming, herbenoeming, klankbordgesprekken en afscheid* (The Hague: Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations).
- Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. (2017) *Circulaire benoeming, klankbordgesprekken en herbenoeming burgemeester* (The Hague: Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations).
- Munck, P. (2016) *On the determinants of external networking of European mayors* (Enschede: University of Twente).

- O'Toole, L. J. (2010) The ties that bind? Networks, public administration, and political science. *PS: Political science & politics*, 43(1), pp. 7-14.
- Quinn, R., Faerman, S., Thompson, M., & McGrath, M. (2003) *Becoming a master manager: a competency approach* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons).
- Rodriguez, D., Patel, R., Bright, A., Gregory, D., & Gowing, M. K. (2002) Developing competency models to promote integrated human resource practices. *Human Resource Management*, 41(3), pp. 309-324.
- Schaap, L., Daemen, H., & Ringeling, A. (2009a) Mayors in seven European countries: Part I - selection procedures and statutory position. *Local Government Studies*, 35(1), pp. 95-108.
- Schaap, L., Daemen, H., & Ringeling, A. (2009b) Mayors in seven European countries: part II - performance and analysis. *Local Government Studies*, 35(2), pp. 235-249.
- Schedlitzki, D., Case, P., & Knights, D. (2017) Ways of leading in non-Anglophone contexts: representing, expressing and enacting authority beyond the English-speaking world. *Leadership*, 13(2), pp. 127–132.
- Sparrow, P. (1995) Organizational competencies: a valid approach for the future? *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, 3(3), pp. 168-177.
- Steyvers, K. (2016) A knight in white satin armour? New institutionalism and mayoral leadership in the era of governance. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 23(3), pp. 289-305.
- Svara, J. H. (1994) *Facilitative leadership in local government: lessons from successful mayors and chairpersons* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass).
- Svara, J. H. (1995) Institutional powers and mayoral leadership. *State & Local Government Review*, 27(1), pp. 71-83.
- Teles, F. (2014) Facilitative mayors in complex environments: why political will matters. *Local Government Studies*, 40(5), pp. 809-829.
- van der Steen, M., & de Jong, I. (2015) De netwerkende burgemeester: beweging tussen binnen en buiten. *Bestuurskunde*, 24(1), pp. 26-36.
- Varje, P., Anttila, E., & Väänänen, A. (2013) Emergence of emotional management: changing manager ideals in Finnish job advertisements from 1949 to 2009. *Management & Organizational History*, 8(3), pp. 245-261.
- Vetter, A., Heinelt, H., & Rose, L. E. (2018) Mayor's notions of local democracy, In: H. Heinelt, A. Magnier, M. Cabria, & H. Reynaert (eds.), *Political leaders and changing local democracy: the European mayor* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 173-208.
- Vogel, R., & Masal, D. (2015) Public leadership: a review of the literature and framework for future research. *Public Management Review*, 17(8), pp. 1165-1189.
- Wollmann, H. (2014) The directly-elected mayor in the German Länder: introduction, implementation and impact. *Public Money & Management*, 34(5), pp. 331-337.
- Yáñez, C. J. N., Magnier, A., & Ramírez, M. A. (2008) Local governance as government–business cooperation in Western democracies: analysing local and intergovernmental effects by multi-level comparison. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 32(3), pp. 531-547.