

# Public or Private – Does It Matter? How School Leaders in Public and Private Schools Perceive Their Roles

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Keywords:  
School leaders  
Core public values  
Public-private  
New public management  
Welfarism

Scandinavian Journal of  
Public Administration  
22(3):129-152  
© Jenny Madestam, Göran  
Sundström, Göran Bergström  
and School of Public  
Administration 2018  
ISSN: 2001-7405  
e-ISSN: 2001-7413

## Abstract

This article takes its stand in an international discussion about how NPM reforms affect public servants' notions about core public values. More specifically, it analyses how school leaders relate to the values of political control, rule of law, economic efficiency, professionalism and users' influence. It raises the question whether it matters, in terms of how they embrace these values, their organisation is public or private. 975 school leaders (481 working for public schools and 472 for private schools) have completed a written questionnaire containing 15 postulations linked to the five core values. The study's main finding is that the differences between the two categories of school leaders are quite small although differences exist. The similarities could reflect a development in recent decades where private schools have undergone politicisation and public schools companyisation. The study indicates that school leaders on both sides try to defend all values simultaneously, in some way. Furthermore, when trying to handle value conflicts they seem to avail themselves of other strategies than those connected to dominating models of rationality, which often conceptualise public actors' response to value conflicts as a matter of balancing or striking trade-offs.

## Introduction

Does working in a state school or an independent school as a school leader make any difference to how you perceive different core public values? That's what this paper is about. Sweden is gradually defining its very own place within the vast political area that is the education system. The last 20 years' discussions of education policies, as well as reforms, have focused on deregulation and market activities. Research shows that the current primary and secondary education system in Sweden is the most deregulated in the western world (Levin and Belfield 2009). As early as the late-1980s, a Labour government had implemented a general decentralisation programme as well as a transfer of powers to local government, with a simultaneous deregulation of the qualifications previously

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demanded of school leaders. In the early-1990s, a Conservative coalition government made free choice of school possible, i.e. freedom to attend the school of your choice irrespective of place of residence, and a new system of state subsidies made it possible to establish and run schools as private enterprises (as opposed to municipal schools), with the possibility of making profits. The education system was to be less controlled by rules and more goal-driven (Jarl et al 2007). The changes were in line with predominant trends of administrative reform in Sweden and the West as a whole; trends which have been addressed by the concept of New Public Management (NPM), which emphasised the importance of emulating the markets and erasing the dividing line between public and private (Christensen & Læg Reid 2007; Ahlbäck-Öberg et al. 2016).

To date, a lot of research on education systems has focused on the question of how NPM reforms affect schools and professionals working in schools. The research has a broad span, from measurable achievements (Berhanu 2010, Musset 2012) to how core public values among educational professionals are affected (Ravitch 2010). For example, Gurr and Drysdale (2005) argue that successful school leadership in Australia can be explained, at least to some extent, by school leaders' values and beliefs. Gold et al (2003) analyse how school leaders accommodate the tension between two different discourses of leadership; one based on "efficiency, effectiveness and performance", the other on "values, learning communities and shared leadership" (p. 127). They show that there is a resistance among school leaders to being influenced by "new managerialism". Similarly, and in common with most countries, Iceland's school system has been strongly influenced by a market discourse. Láurisdóttir (2014) borrows Gewirtz's (2002) distinction between the concepts of "welfarism" (public service) and "new public management" (customer service) to describe two different discourses, which also function as guidelines for school leaders' practical work. She uses these concepts to analyse school leaders' perceptions regarding changes in the professional environment of schools in the period 1995-2005, and shows that the work of school leaders has changed. More time is spent on issues relating to budgeting and administration, reducing time for students' welfare, teaching and learning. However, she also found that school leaders tend to defend values associated with welfarism, such as care and responsibility towards students, and pedagogical components such as teaching and learning.

In Láurisdóttir's article, values are seen above all as variables that can be affected by reforms in general and by NPM reforms in particular. In the wider literature on public administration, this is quite a common way to view core public values. Several studies have been conducted discussing the impact of NPM reforms on values held by public servants. For example, Fredrickson (1999) has expressed concern about the ethical consequences of NPM reforms, such as marketisation, privatisation, and outsourcing (see also Maesschalck 2004). Others criticise NPM for undermining the value of legal certainty (or "rule of law") when, in a somewhat casual way, trying to eliminate red tape and disseminating simple slogans about "letting managers manage" (Moe and Gil-mour 1995). Others maintain that NPM reforms threaten the value of profession-

alism; that the reforms lead to introversion of organisations and a growing fear of speaking out against superiors, which can be linked partly to an increased dependence on the immediate superior, who often decides on promotions and salary increases (Lundquist 1998), but also to increased competition and the use of steering models drawn from the private sector, where organisations are discussed and managed as separate units with separate goals and separate accountability for results. These changes will, it is argued, increase the organisations' inclination to protect their own interests and goals, rather than the state's and its citizens' interests and goals (Brunsson and Sahlin Andersson 2000).

In line with the studies above, we also have an interest in how NPM reforms affect public servants' notion about various core values that guide administrative behaviour. Our study focuses on an important group of public servants, i.e. school leaders. NPM is, however, a broad concept which embraces many kinds of ideas, both management and neo-liberal oriented (Hood 1991; Boston et al. 1996; Karlsson 2017). However, a core idea within NPM is that more activities within society should be exposed to competition, preferably in private markets. To address how NPM has affected core values held by school leaders, we have therefore chosen to examine one specific variable, namely whether the school that the school leader is heading is public or private.

Based on a model of ideal-types of organisations, each representing different sets of values (Brunsson 1994), we can expect to see some differences between school leaders heading public schools and school leaders heading schools run as private enterprises when it comes to how they perceive core public values. For example, schools run as private enterprises, ideally located close to “the company”, can be expected to put more emphasis on the values mentioned by Gold et al (2003), that is, efficiency, effectiveness, and performance, than public schools. The latter group, on the other hand, which ideally is closer located to “the political organisation” can be expected to put more emphasis on the value political control. Lundström et al (2017) conclude that school leaders in public and private schools have different attitudes against market reforms, where the latter has a more positive attitude than the former. From one point of view we can expect that public and independent school leaders have different ideas about different core values.

At the same time, as mentioned above, NPM may have led to a general “companyisation” of politically oriented organisations, and thus made them more inclined to emphasise the values of efficiency, effectiveness, and performance. Meanwhile, private enterprises have for some time, and increasingly, taken on the characteristics of the political organisation (Brunsson 1994). This begs our research question: Does it matter to school leaders in terms of how they embrace core public values, whether their organisation is public or private?

## **Theoretical framework – Core public values**

According to Brunsson (1994) “the political organisation” and “the company” can be seen as two distinct institutions. As such they define not only the nature

of organisations and the actors within them but also the composition of their environment as well as the actors within these environments and their particular interests.

As organisations need legitimacy from both these sets of actors – inside the organisation and in its environment – the members of the organisation need to behave in line with institutionalised ideas of how the political organisation and the company ought to behave. However, these ideas differ between the two (Brunsson 1994). For example, while the most important external actors for the political organisation are the citizen and the politician, the customer and the owner are the most important actors for the company. The political organisation is run under democratic control while the company is run on a competitive market. For the company specialisation and action are main organisational principals, while generalisation and deliberation are more important for the political organisation. On the whole, *that* things are achieved are of much more importance for the company than *how*, whereas the how-question is of major concern for the political organisation.

Thus, as ideal types the political organisation and the company differ, which means that members of organisations that can be associated with one or the other have to adapt to institutionalised ideas of how the political organisation or the company behave. However, in recent decades public organisations have taken on characteristics of the private company (so called companyisation), while, at the same time, private enterprises have taken on characteristics of the political organisation (so called politicisation) (Brunsson 1994 p. 329-330).

Companyisation of public organisations can, not the least, be expected to take place when they are exposed to competition, which they are within the Swedish school sector, which we investigate. Politicisation of private enterprises can, in turn, not the least be expected to take place when they receive public funds for carrying out public commitments, which they do within the Swedish school sector. In fact, private schools are in Sweden public in all dimensions of a public commitment except for ownership. Thus, responsibility for execution (*utföransvar*), regulation, financing and control are mainly all public activities, also for private schools. This means that private schools can be perceived as highly public, and therefore they have to adhere to the same set of core values as public schools. From this point of departure we should anticipate that whether you work in a public or private school doesn't matter that much regarding attitudes to core values.

Which are those core values? It is often claimed – by both scholars and practitioners – that public organisations have to adhere to three specific values in order for the state to remain legitimate in the eyes of the citizens. These values are *political control*, *the rule of law* and *economic efficiency* (see i.e. Söderlind och Petersson 1988; Ehn 1998; SOU 1997:57). Rothstein (2010) also points out *professionalism* and *users' influence* as core public values (c.f. van der Wal & van Hout 2009; Gutmann 1999). All five values are in some way anchored in Swedish laws, which underscore that they encompass everyone working with public commitments, whether in the public or independent form.

Below we will discuss why, and in what way, these values are important to accommodate when executing public services, and also how they are connected to sources of law. It should, however, be clarified, that even though all organisations that take part in the executing of a public commitment, have to take into account all these values their importance can be expected to vary between policy fields (i.e. the rule of law may be especially emphasised among courts), and also over time (i.e. economic efficiency may be especially emphasised when state finances are strained). To what extent the values are emphasised in practice within a specific policy field (i.e. the school sector) and among different kinds of organisations (i.e. public and private schools) is an empirical question. That's what this paper is about to investigate.

We will now briefly discuss the five values in terms of basic norms, loyalties, core expressions, role models and supportive regulation. We will also say something about how we expect each value to differ between school leaders in public and private schools.

The value *political control* is at the heart of representative democracy. It focuses on the instrumental quality of public service. The will of the people is the basic norm. "All public power in Sweden proceeds from the people" is the first sentence in the Instrument of Government (*Regeringsformen*, RF). The legitimacy of the model depends on the politicians' ability to capture and articulate the citizens' demands and desires, and their ability to transform them into activities. The RF also stipulates that the government should govern the Realm and that government authorities come under the government (RF 1:6, 12:1). In a similar way the Swedish Local Government Act (*Kommunallagen*, KL) stipulates that assemblies and executive committees on the local and regional levels should direct and co-ordinate the administration on these levels (KL 3:9, 6:1 and 6:7). Thus, according to this value, the administration's loyalty lies solely with those elected by the people, who are clearly given a superior role. Core expressions for the public servants are perceptivity and flexibility in their relations to the politicians. The administration is regarded as the extended arm of the politicians – their (unquestioning) representative.

The education system is subject to control on two political levels. One is the national level, by means of the Swedish Education Act and other regulations; the other is the local government level, by means of the municipalities' responsibility as provider of education and of financing the schools (Fredriksson 2010). All primary and secondary schools are subject to control on the national level, but local politics only have a bearing on municipal schools, not on independent schools. However, the results of several studies show that in some municipalities there is no discernible difference in practice between municipal schools and independent schools when it comes to relations with the political level.

For a number of reasons – e.g. that politics is about compromising, that politicians are not experts and that they are very busy – policies and political control signals are often unclear and difficult to interpret. However, research shows that public servants develop various techniques for interpreting the will of politicians (Jacobsson et al 2015; Page and Jenkins 2005). One obvious technique is that the

school leader and the politician simply having a talk, which implies short distance. Research shows that school leaders working in smaller municipalities have more contact with local politicians (cf. Jarl 2012). However, school leaders may have difficulties in making the politicians clarify goals and directives when interacting directly with them. School leaders may also deliberately distance themselves from the political level. In such cases, they can seek guidance elsewhere, e.g. through speeches, public announcements, addresses to the public, interviews in media, previous decisions etc (Jacobsson et al 2015).

We expect this value to be emphasised more by school leaders in public schools than in private schools, because public schools are formally subordinated to local politicians. Being a private school means you are independent from the local political control, and this probably invoke on the perceptions about political control.

The administration should also act according to *the rule of law*. Here, the basic norm is not the will of the people but the legal system. Obedience is not first and foremost directed towards those currently in power, but towards the law (Lundquist 1998). “Public power is exercised under the law”, according to the first paragraph of the RF. In the second we learn that: “Public power should be exercised with respect for the equal worth of all and the liberty and dignity of the individual”, and that: “The public institutions should combat discrimination of persons...” (RF 1:2). Further, in the first chapter of the RF it is stipulated that the authorities: ...”should pay regard in their work to the equality of all before the law and should observe objectivity and impartiality.” (RF 1:9). A similar provision can be found in the KL, stating that: “Municipalities and county councils are to treat their members equally, unless there are objective reasons to the contrary.” (KL 2:2). Overall, there are several basic rules dealing with equality and objectivity. Also, the principle of judicial review, i.e. that a civil servant should not apply a rule which conflicts with a higher rule (RF 12:10), and the regulated protection of “whistle-blowers” in the Freedom of the Press Act (TF) aim to strengthen the rule of law (TF ch. 3). What can be deducted from all these rules is that it is not self-evident that public servants should be flexible and sensitive to control signals emanating from politicians. The core expressions should instead be objectivity, integrity, honesty and equality. The role model here is the impartial judge.

We expect this core value to be emphasised by both public and private schools, not least since the substantial value of equity has had a prominent position within Swedish school policy in recent decades (Bergström & Millares 2016).

The public service should also work *economically efficient*. The most important thing according to this value is not how goals are achieved but that it is done in the most economically efficient way. The norm is the private enterprise. During the last decades, the public sector has step-by-step borrowed a whole set of concepts prevalent in the corporate world and management literature, concepts that used to be alien to the public sector: productivity, efficiency, cost per unit, financial ratio, financial results etc (Andersson et al 2017). There has also

been a major increase of financial and management posts and units in the administration. Linked to this trend has also been a gradual strengthening of the perception that competition and other market mechanisms will put pressure on the administration to change, to make it more economically efficient. The citizen has been transformed into a customer and the core expressions that are to guide public servants are: service-mindedness, rationality, flexibility, renewability and cost awareness. This value is not supported in the RF. However, the Budget law, implemented in 1996, underlines the need to exercise good economic management in central government (SFS 2011:203, 1:3), and a similar provision regarding the municipalities and county councils was added to the KL in 2000 (KL 8:1).

Since private schools ideally are located closer to “the company” than public schools – not least expressed by their overall goal being to make profit – we can expect this value to be more underlined by school leaders in private schools. At the same time, due to increased competition and recurring saving requirements public schools can be expected to have experienced processes of companionship, which means that they also may adhere quite heavily to the value of economic efficiency.

The administration should also be *professional*. The norm here is the public servant’s own professional standards and substantial core values. Such a value could e.g. for a doctor be “life-preserving” and for a teacher “efficient life-long learning”. A professional public servant is expected to solve practical problems related to the authority’s assignment – never losing sight of the common good and firmly based on scientific knowledge – rather than complying with political signals, formal rules or financial guidelines (Klasson 2010). The professional public servant must be autonomous vis-à-vis politicians and stakeholder. The role model is the expert, and since experts have specific knowledge they should always be consulted before decisions are made.

In the RF it is stipulated that in the preparation of government issues necessary information and opinions must be obtained from the public authorities concerned and from local authorities (RF 7:2). Politicians on the local level, however, are entitled to request information from public servants before making any decision, and if they do, it is the duty of the servants to furnish this information (KL 5:22 and 6:3). It is further stipulated in the RF that: “When making appointments to posts within central government, only objective factors, such as merit and competence, should be considered” (RF 12:5), and according to the Public Employment Act competence is to be valued higher than merit (seniority). Briefly stated, central government should only employ experts. There are no regulations to that effect for local government.

This value is probably highly emphasised by school leaders in both public and private schools. One could argue that increased competition has led to school leaders and teachers from different schools treating each other more as competitors and that the distance between them therefore has increased. This, in turn, may weaken the value of professionalism, as close exchanges between professionals are a distinct trait of professionalism.

Professionalism means that school leaders make their decisions on the basis of specific expert knowledge and experience, which added up gives those in the profession an advantage vis-à-vis politicians, users and the logics of the markets. Traditionally, school leaders and teachers have belonged to the same professional category, but by the end of the 1980s school leaders began to cut out their own professional profile (Ullman 1997 pp. 218-227). This coincided with NPM making its entrance in the public sector, and while some researchers claim that NPM threatens professionals in general (Freidson 2001) there are others who maintain that the result of NPM has been less hierarchical structures and more autonomy for professionals. On top of that, the differences between public and private organisations are becoming less pronounced. School leaders have to a large extent been turned into managers of their schools (e.g. Jarl et al. 2011), and they are developing several characteristics distinctive of so called occupational professionalism – ethical guidelines, scientifically based traineeship and high school education, economic rewards and increased legitimacy (ibid.). However, if this is the case it may have affected both public and private schools equally, as they both are exposed to competition.

*Users' influence*, finally, embraces the idea that users should not be passive recipients of public services but participate in the construction of them. Public sector activities should to a higher extent be based on the needs of individuals and groups. The public servant has an important role to play here, as a kind of moderator, but it is also important to mobilise individuals and groups, otherwise the already strong and organised actors may become even stronger, while weaker and less organised actors will find it difficult to stake their claims.

Users' influence is not supported in the RF, but the KL stipulates that any person resident in the municipality may raise a question in the assembly (KL 5:23), and that the political authorities should ensure that consultation is carried out with those receiving services (KL 6:6).

This value may on the one hand be highly emphasised by school leaders in private schools, because the idea of the user bears clear resemblance with the idea of the customer. On the other hand, the idea of users' influence stems from two models of democracy, usually called participatory democracy and deliberative democracy (Held 1997). And since public schools ideally are located close to "the political organisation", which is a part of the democratic system, we can expect this value to be emphasised also by public schools.

To participate is here *per se* regarded as a broadening experience, essential to the community spirit and to life itself (Held 1997; Barber 1984). The ideal of deliberative democracy stresses the importance of talks and arguments. The discussion and the possibility of making your voice heard and being listened to do not only give the individual great happiness but is also for the general good.

Ideas about users' influence have strongly influenced the Swedish education system, e.g. through the relatively extensive national regulation of student councils and parents' influence (Jarl 2004), but also through rules about student majority in school boards (The Government 1996), and boards with a parent majority (The Government 1997). A number of government commissions have exam-

ined users' influence on education, particularly between 1995 and into the 2000s. Some research on the education system carried out during this period also focused on pupil and parent influence (e.g. Forsberg 2000; Ståhle 2000). On this basis, we should expect a strong emphasis on the value users' influence, regardless of the type of school. However, the opposite trend has also been observed in recent years. In 2007 the government abolished the regulation making it possible to have schools run by the pupils. Broadly speaking, the education system has also been subject to increased central regulation with the new Education Act and the new Curriculum.

From the user's perspective, voice is the core word. However, when you are a user you do not make your voice heard only for your own sake. The user does not only have rights, in the sense that 'the customer is always right', but also (democratic) obligations vis-à-vis the community at large. The target is the pupils and/or the parents as a group in a community, not individual customers on the education market. The users' perspective stresses – as opposed to the customers' perspective – that interests and preferences can be modified through talks with other parties involved in the activities. Key words for the civil servant when applying a users' perspective are participation, mobilisation and openness, and any manifestation of dissatisfaction will be rectified by means of listening to what the pupils/parents have to say and to take that into consideration.

Table 1: Scheme for analysing five core public values

	<b>Political control</b>	<b>Rule of law</b>	<b>Economic efficiency</b>	<b>Professionalism</b>	<b>Users' influence</b>
<i>Basic norm</i>	The will of the people	The judicial system	The private enterprise	Own profession	The user
<i>Loyal to</i>	Elected politicians	The law	The organisation	The citizen	The needs of individuals and groups
<i>Core expressions</i>	Perceptivity (upwards) Adherence Representativity	Objectivity Equity Integrity Predictability	Competitiveness Service Creativity Businesslike	Expertise Problem solving Independence Experience based learning	Perceptivity (outwards) Moderation Mobiliser
<i>Role model</i>	The representative	The judge	The manager	The expert	The moderator

*To conclude*, public servants are required to safeguard several core public values – to be loyal to the politicians, to formal rules, to the citizens, to the management of the organisation, and to professional standards. All these values are desirable but may be hard to combine. Public servants – like the politicians controlling them – thus constantly face the same problem when having to act in certain situ-

ations: how to balance different values. The education system is a field where all the values are at work at the same time and where it is difficult to tell which one of them should be dominant. Consequently, school leaders are highly susceptible to be in the line of this crossfire of demands (Svedberg 2011; Fredriksson 2010; Pierre 2007).

## Method

Since 2011 newly recruited school leaders in Sweden must participate in an academic program (30 ects, *Rektorsprogrammet, RP*) launched in 2009. The program is voluntary for preschool leaders and for school leaders recruited before 2011. The latter have also been able to attend a shorter program with a similar content as RP (*Rektorslyftet, RL*). Since 2009 nearly 5 000 persons have completed, or still attend, the RP. Stockholm University is one of six universities that administrate the program, and the Department of Political Science – where the authors of this article work – is responsible for one part of the program dealing with (among other things) core public values relevant for professionals within the school system.

To determine how school leaders perceive the core values we asked them to complete a written questionnaire containing 15 postulations. Some of these deal with attitudes, others with behaviour. The postulations are seen as value indicators. The school leaders have indicated to what extent they agree with what is postulated. The alternatives were “very high degree”, “rather high degree”, “rather low degree”, “very low degree” and “do not know”. We have formulated three postulations per value, and at the beginning of every empirical section below the relevant postulations and the result are presented in a table. How the indicators relate to the values is discussed in the empirical section.

The number of school leaders who took part in the study is 975, of which 481 represent public schools and 472 independent schools (22 thus failed to indicate type of school form). Even if we lack exact data about the different kinds of independent schools attending the program (e.g. cooperatives run some schools) there is very strong evidence for the postulation we make that an overwhelming majority of school leaders from independent schools attending the program are employed in profitmaking private schools.

According to public statistics, a vast majority of public spending on independent schools goes to private enterprises (Skolverket 2014; Statistics Sweden). During the period of our research (2015/16) 76% of public finances spent on independent schools went to profitmaking private schools. The share of private upper secondary schools were even higher, 88%, and for pre-schools 70% (Statistics Sweden). If we look at the number of schools dominated by profitmaking private actors we get the same picture. 61% of all independent schools and 87% of the upper secondary schools are profitmaking private schools (Ekonomifakta, “Friskolor i aktiebolagsform”). This trend of transforming independent schools to profitmaking private schools has accelerated since 2010 (Skolverket 2014). Our sample of school leaders is primarily working in the region of Stockholm, in

which school concerns dominates (Skolverket 2014). These facts strengthen our postulation that it is mainly school leaders from profit-making schools in our sample of private schools.

The data were collected from September 2011 to January 2015. The school leaders were asked to complete our form while attending our course, which is placed in the middle of the program. The school leaders represent all levels in the Swedish school system: preschool (approximately 20%), secondary school (55%), high school (20%), and various special school forms (NBA 2014). A majority, close to 70 percent, is female, which is representative for all school leaders in Sweden. Also, regarding age, our group is representative for Swedish school leaders in general.

As stated above, school leaders in the RP are less experienced than school leaders in general in Sweden. However, in our sample of 975 school leaders we have also included 121 school leaders attending the RL, who are more experienced. The results from the two groups of school leaders do not differ, i.e. experience does not seem to be a crucial factor for how school leaders relate to core values.

A majority of all school leaders in our group, around 80 percent, can be found in the Stockholm area, where the competitive pressure on schools is high. The share of school leaders representing independent schools is also higher for school leaders attending the RP at Stockholm University (50%) compared to Sweden as a whole (30%). Thus, the school leaders attending our study do not constitute a representative sample of all school leaders who have been working in Sweden since 2011. Rather, it is a large sample from school leaders who have been working in the Stockholm area since 2011.<sup>1</sup> The response rate is 100 percent.

## **Results**

In this section we present and discuss the results from the empirical analysis of the questionnaire. The section is structured along the five core values and the three postulates linked to each value. When discussing the results according to each value, school leaders in public schools are compared to school leaders in independent ones.

### **Political control**

A clear majority of all the school leaders – especially those heading municipal schools – agree with postulation 1: “I develop my work according to political goals and guidelines”. This indicates that the democratic chain of command is working quite well within the education system.

Table 2: Political control

(percentage of answers “very high” or “quite high”)	Municipal and independent principals		
	Municipal	Independent	Difference
1. I develop my work according to political goals and guidelines.	0.91 (0.87-0.95)	0.76 (0.72-0.80)	0.15*** (0.10-0.21)
8. My work is carried out on the basis of discussions with politicians responsible for education in my municipality.	0.23 (0.20-0.26)	0.08 (0.05-0.11)	0.15*** (0.11-0.19)
12. In my work as school leader I take into consideration statements made by leading politicians responsible for education.	0.56 (0.27-0.40)	0.33 (0.49-0.64)	0.23*** (0.13-0.32)

Survey data collected by the authors. Confidence intervals reported below each estimate. The column *Difference* denotes \*\*\* 1%, \*\* 5%, \* 10% significance.

There is, however, a possibility that school leaders in independent schools are more inclined to embrace signals emanating from the national level and to a lesser extent to local government guidelines. This hypothesis is supported by the answers to postulation 8: “My work is carried out on the basis of discussions with politicians responsible for education in my municipality.” The number of school leaders that agree with this is generally low. Only about one fourth of the school leaders in municipal schools have indicated a high degree. A possible explanation to this rather low figure could be that many of the school leaders attending this study are working in large municipalities where the contact with local politicians is uncommon. However, among school leaders in independent schools less than one out of ten has indicated a high degree of agreement with the postulation.

It is possible that school leaders who do not engage in talks with local politicians wish to do so more often. If that is the case they will probably pay attention to what politicians say in documents, in speeches, in the media and elsewhere. It could also be the case that they do not think their work should be subject to discussions with local politicians. Even in this case school leaders could be expected to pay attention to general statements made by leading politicians. As shown in table 2, postulation 12, statements made by politicians are relatively important to the school leaders. Close to half of them state that they take into consideration, to a great extent, what leading politicians responsible for education say. The figure is clearly higher for school leaders in public schools than in independent schools, which perhaps can be explained by that the former are listening to both national and local politicians, while the latter perhaps are less inclined to lend their ears to local politicians.

*To conclude*, the differences between school leaders in municipal schools and in independent schools are relatively large when it comes to the value political control, the differences are significant as well. The former agree to a greater

extent than the latter in all three postulations, and the differences are significant. Talks with local politicians are relatively rare in both categories, but are much less frequent in the case of independent schools, as we expected. That they work according to political guidelines, on the other hand, is to a high degree agreed to by both categories, but by a slightly larger share of school leaders in municipal schools; likewise, for taking political statements into consideration.

### The rule of law

A vast majority of the school leaders strongly agree with postulation 9, that the teachers at their school first and foremost should be guided by impartiality and objectivity in their work (see table 3 below). More than half of them also agree in postulation 15: “I am not favorably inclined towards goal and guidelines formulated outside formal regulations.” This indicates that there is a general reluctance to be controlled by political documents outlining goals and strategies that lack the unequivocal legal status of formal rules.

When comparing the two groups of respondents one might expect that school leaders in public schools would play down the importance of the rule of law somewhat since political control – which they (according to this study) value higher than school leaders in independent schools – could be seen as somewhat opposed to the rule of law. On the other hand, some critics claim that increased competition between schools has led to a situation where grades awarded to pupils are too high when related to their actual knowledge – the rational being that schools that set higher grades attract students – and that independent schools are particularly inclined to downplay the rule of law in favor of market shares. However, when looking at the answers to our postulations this do not seem to be the case.

Table 3: Rule of law

(percentage of answers “very high” or “quite high”)	Municipal and independent principals		
	Municipal	Independent	Difference
5. In my work I often ask legal experts for help.	0.23 (0.20-0.26)	0.24 (0.19-0.29)	-0.01 (-0.05-0.07)
9. Our teachers should first and foremost be guided by objectivity and impartiality in their work.	0.93 (0.92-0.95)	0.89 (0.84-0.93)	0.05* (0.00-0.09)
15. I am not favourably inclined towards goal and guidelines formulated outside formal regulations.	0.59 (0.44-0.74)	0.55 (0.52-0.59)	0.04 (-0.12-0.19)

Survey data collected by the authors. Confidence intervals reported below each estimate. The column *Difference* denotes \*\*\* 1%, \*\* 5%, \* 10% significance.

We also tried to nail down the value of the rule of law with a postulation (number 5) about the school leaders inclination to turn to experts on law. The wording of the postulation was based on the school leaders' complex role, including a number of different values which should be acted on, but also in the light of the regulation of the education system, which is not only vast but also often ambiguous and interpretable. However, not even one out of four school leaders agree, to a high degree, with the postulation that they often resort to asking experts on law to help with the running of the school. If this is a manifestation of the school leaders' not finding the regulation particularly difficult to implement, or whether it is an expression of a lack of resources to consult the experts we do not know, however.

To conclude, the answers show that school leaders value objectivity and impartiality very highly, and this is true for all of them. No significant differences can be identified. The expressions of rule of law are what they want their teachers to be guided by first and foremost. There is also a general skepticism regarding goals and strategy documents existing parallel to formal regulations. On the other hand, they do not seem to be at the ready to call in experts on law, which indicates that school leaders generally do not find the formal regulation too ambiguous and interpretable. And even if they do, most of them seem to think there is no help to find among the experts on law.

### Economic efficiency

Postulation number 11 in table 4, that it is important that teachers are willing to promote their school and are able to do so, is directly linked to the marketing theme and the idea that school personnel should function as market managers. Also linked to this is the constant effort to improve the standing of the product being marketed, which is reflected in postulation number 6, that work is carried out with the aim of improving the school's standing with parents and pupils.

Table 4: Economic efficiency

(percentage of answers "very high" or "quite high")	Municipal and independent principals		
	Municipal	Independent	Difference
3. An important basis for my planning is surveys on what type of education parents and pupils demand.	0.29 (0.24-0.34)	0.46 (0.40-0.51)	-0.17*** (-0.24-0.10)
6. The aim of my work is to improve the standing of my school in the eyes of parents and pupils.	0.85 (0.81-0.89)	0.86 (0.83-0.89)	-0.01 (-0.06-0.04)
11. It is important that the teachers are willing and able to participate in the marketing of our school.	0.82 (0.77-0.88)	0.85 (0.79-0.90)	-0.03 (-0.10-0.05)

Survey data collected by the authors. Confidence intervals reported below each estimate. The column *Difference* denotes \*\*\* 1%, \*\* 5%, \* 10% significance.

The answers imply that the marketing model's sales and customer logics have penetrated the school system to a high degree, regardless of school form (the small differences in postulation 6 and 11 is not significant). More than eight out of ten school leaders think that the teachers should take part in the marketing of the school. High figures can also be found regarding the postulation that it is important to improve the standing of the school. These high figures may reflect the fact the most of the school leaders in our study work for schools highly exposed to competition.

A second theme linked to the marketing model could be described as a kind of submission. According to the traditional hierarchical bureaucratic model, both the school leader and the teacher are in a sense superior to parents and pupils. However, in a market system school leaders define their own and the school's strategies according to a certain logic where the producer should develop a product that as closely as possible fulfills the demands made by parents and pupils (the 'customers'). The school leader is responsible for the school's planning and consequently needs information about the parents' and the pupils' preferences. Relations to other actors may also come into the picture. School leaders as managers will not have as their primary goal to promote values that could diminish the attractiveness of the education on offer.

Postulation number 3 – “surveys of what types of education parents and pupils are looking for constitute important grounds for my planning” – captures the importance school leaders ascribe to interests and preferences among pupils and parents. Here, the figures for school leaders in independent schools are clearly significant higher than the figures for school leaders in public schools.<sup>1</sup> This difference confirms that independent schools to some extent are a bit more market oriented.

*To conclude*, regardless of school form the picture emanating from the answers to the survey clearly underlines the importance of marketing. School leaders are subject to sharp competition and take it for granted that teachers will participate in the marketing of their schools. The only notable deviation from the picture of the school leader as the spitting image of the head of a marketing organisation concerns surveys about preferences among pupils and parents, and this is particularly the case for school leaders in public schools.

### Professionalism

Roughly half of the school leaders indicated a high degree of agreement with the postulation that their work is carried out on the basis of talks with their colleagues (see table 5 below). The figure is somewhat higher for school leaders in municipal schools. This significant difference could be explained by the fact that some municipalities regularly arrange meetings for school leaders working in the municipality. But it could also be interpreted as a conflict between the market

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<sup>1</sup> Some caution should be exercised when interpreting the overall validity of economic efficiency as a simple reliability test reveals that the standardised Cronbach's alpha is below 0.5.

logic and professionalism. A school leader who is markedly managerial will not primarily wish to engage in “talks with my colleagues”, i.e. with the ‘competitors’.

Table 5: Professionalism

(percentage of answers “very high” or “quite high”)	Municipal and independent principals		
	Municipal	Independent	Difference
2. My work is based on discussions held with fellow school leaders.	0.58 (0.54-0.62)	0.46 (0.41-0.52)	0.11*** (0.05-0.18)
10. I want the teachers at our school to base their planning and educational efforts on their professional knowledge and experience.	0.99 (0.99-1.00)	0.98 (0.97-0.99)	0.01* (0.00-0.02)
14. In order to improve the quality and efficiency of the school more issues should be delegated from the political level to school leaders and teachers.	0.76 (0.71-0.81)	0.71 (0.67-0.74)	0.05* (-0.01-0.12)

Survey data collected by the authors. Confidence intervals reported below each estimate. The column *Difference* denotes \*\*\* 1%, \*\* 5%, \* 10% significance.

A second theme is linked to the notion of the professional representing the unimpeachable expert. During the course of educational history neither the school leader nor the teacher has been the obvious expert. The Nordic perspective has been that the expert, basically represented by the central educational bureaucracy, has the strongest position. Furthermore, descriptions of educational reforms made during the last century normally highlight the importance of the scientific community. However, with the decentralising of the primary and secondary schools, and recently when the new Education Act was enacted, the formal position of the school leaders was reinforced, which in turn has an impact on the school leaders’ functions and contributes to a strengthening of professional claims.

The expert dimension is captured in postulation number 10 and number 14, where the latter also contains a more general view on control and power over education. Almost all the respondents indicate a high degree of agreement with the postulation that it is important that teachers use their knowledge and experience when planning their work. We turn instead to the fact that more than 7 out of 10 respondents have indicated a preference for more professional power in education, by agreeing to a high degree with postulation number 14, that more issues should be delegated from the political level to school leaders and teachers in order to enhance the quality of and the efficiency in the educational system. It is a historic reality that large numbers of professionals working within the educational system distrust political control of the educational system, which was particularly evident in connection with the inflamed debate on transferring the responsibility for the primary and secondary education from the state to the mu-

nicipalities in the late 1980s. However, such criticism has emanated primarily from teachers, not school leaders. We do not know if the postulation “delegation of power to the profession” has been interpreted as “delegation to the level of individual schools” rather than specifically “to the school leader”, because in the postulation school leaders are mentioned as well as teachers.

The lack of difference between school leaders in municipal schools and school leaders in independent schools regarding postulation 10 and 14 can be interpreted as both groups having a strong professional sense. It can also be that the school leaders’ do not put much trust in politicians and their possibilities to change the education system via political decisions. However, school leaders’ skepticism could also come across as a positive sign; here we have a cadre of professionals guarding the citizens against hasty decisions made by tampering and ignorant politicians.<sup>2</sup>

*To conclude*, we do not find any major difference between the two groups of school leaders’ attitude to the value ‘professionalism’. But, in one aspect they differ. The public school leaders have more contact with other school leaders. Looking at the group school leaders as a whole the picture becomes to some extent diffused. The collegial dimension does not necessarily occupy the predominant place that could be expected when professional claims are strong. At the same time the school leaders strongly underline their position in terms of powers of decision-making and regard themselves (and the teachers) as better equipped to decide in educational matters than the politicians.

#### Users’ influence

As shown in table 6, school leaders in independent schools stress the importance of users’ influence somewhat more than school leaders in municipal schools. One difference concerns the first postulation (number 4): “Work in our school is implemented on the basis of discussions held with parents and pupils.” Around half of the school leaders in municipal schools agree, but for school leaders in independent schools the share is two thirds. The lower response rate in the former group could be related to the fact that it has more contacts with local politicians.

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<sup>2</sup> Some caution should be exercised when interpreting the overall validity of professionalism as a simple reliability test reveals that the standardised Cronbach’s alpha is below 0.5.

Table 6: Users' influence

(percentage of answers "very high" or "quite high")	Municipal and independent principals		
	Municipal	Independent	Difference
4. Work in our school is carried out on the basis of discussions held with parents and pupils.	0.52 (0.50-0.54)	0.66 (0.60-0.72)	-0.14*** (-0.21-0.08)
7. In our school we use recurring evaluations of how pupils and parents perceive the school.	0.87 (0.84-0.89)	0.92 (0.89-0.95)	-0.05** (-0.09-0.01)
13. I believe that the students' council should be able to influence to a great extent how work in our school is developed.	0.29 (0.24-0.34)	0.46 (0.40-0.51)	-0.17*** (-0.24-0.10)

Survey data collected by the authors. Confidence intervals reported below each estimate. The column Difference denotes \*\*\* 1%, \*\* 5%, \* 10% significance.

Agreement with postulation 7, "In our school we use recurring evaluations of how pupils and parents perceive the school", was high for both groups. This clearly indicates sensitivity to users' interests, but there is a significant difference where the independent school leaders agree to a greater extent. However, evaluation has also become a highly institutionalised idea, and is a central ingredient in "The Audit Society" (Power 1999). Evaluation also fits NPM oriented management models for control, like management by objectives and results. Evaluations then become a means for achieving the most efficient control possible rather than more qualitative listening to the users' opinions and desires.

Finally, as indicated by the answers to postulation number 13, independent school leaders agree more to the postulation that students' council should have a significant influence on the activities. An influential students' council goes hand in hand with deliberative democracy; achieving the goal of the common good requires discussions and talks, which is what the students' council can provide. The significant difference between municipal and independent school leaders can perhaps be explained by a more emphasis to this, as it may affect the students remaining.

*To conclude*, it is clear that all the school leaders stress the importance of users' influence. Differences between the two categories exist and are significant, with clear predominance for school leaders in independent schools.

## Conclusion

This article takes its stand in an international discussion about how NPM reforms affect public servants' notions about core public values. More specifically, we have analysed how school leaders relate to the values of political control, rule of law, economic efficiency, professionalism and users' influence. We have raised the question whether it matters to them, in terms of how they embrace

these values, whether their organisation is public or private. Our suggestion, after analysing our empirical data, is that there are differences regarding some of the values, but that there also are many similarities.

One can always discuss how much response frequencies need to differentiate in order for them to be characterised as big or small, but we would nevertheless like to make the general claim that there are significant differences between the two categories of school leaders in some instances. In line with our expectation school leaders in municipal schools seem to be a bit closer to the politicians than school leaders in independent schools. However, regarding values like the rule of law the responses made by the two categories of school leaders show great similarities. In relation to the value economic efficiency and professionalism the picture is mixed; significant more school leaders in independent schools use surveys of pupils and parents for planning the education whereas it is significant more common for public school leaders to base their work on discussions with fellow school leaders. According to user's influence there is a significant difference where independent school leaders to a greater extent agree in denoting user's influence.

To conclude; in 8 of 15 postulations there is no significant differences between the two groups of school leaders. Primarily this is the case for the values rule of law, economic efficiency and professional. For these core values there are no big differences. However, for the values political control and user's influence we identify significant differences. Public school leaders underscore political control whereas the independent ones underscore user's influence.

The differences differ in size; in 8 of 15 postulations is the differences less than ten percent, in 7 of the postulations the differences is bigger than ten percent.

## Discussion

When looking at the way schools are organised – as public or private – our study does not support the claim that NPM reforms foster two different discourses – “democratic spirit” and “entrepreneurial spirit” to use Gawthorps (1998) dichotomy – where school leaders working in public schools belong to the former and school leaders working in private schools belong to the latter.

Even though there are differences, especially regarding the values political control and user's influence, we get the impression that school leaders on both sides try to embrace all values simultaneously. Students of public administration and public policy often conceptualise public actors' response to value conflicts as a matter of balancing, or striking trade-offs, among conflicting values. However, our study indicates that the handling of value conflicts not necessarily take the form of a zero-sum game. As Thatcher and Rein (2004) argue, public actors sometimes avail themselves of other strategies than those connected to dominating models of rationality when trying to handle value conflicts: they may for example focus on each value sequentially, emphasising one value and then the other (“cycling”); they may establish multiple institutions committed to different

values, walling off each institution from the responsibility of the others (“fire-walls”); or they may encourage case-by-case judgment about how specific decisions should be made, using analogical reasoning to do so (“casuistry”). It is possible that also school leaders resort to these kinds of strategies when confronted with conflicts between the values we have examined.

Differences in response regarding the values of political control and users’ influence are not surprising. School leaders in public school have a more obvious connection to the political level than school leaders in independent schools, which instead stress the value of users’ influence to a greater extent. The latter can probably be related to marketisation and the idea of listening to the customers. Lundström et al (2017) showed how public and independent school leaders have different attitudes towards market reforms. Perhaps our result, which shows significant differences, is an expression in line of those attitudes.

At the same time, as showed, there are similarities, and one way to explain those is that the NPM reforms have moved school leaders of both kinds towards the discourse of “entrepreneurial spirit”. However, such an interpretation is problematic, because the school leaders do not deemphasise values connected to the “democratic spirit” or “welfarism”. For example both groups of school leaders strongly embrace the value rule of law. Using Brunsson’s model of ideal-types of organisations the similarities between the two types of school leaders may instead be explained by public school undergoing companyisation and private schools politicisation.

The lack of two distinct discourses among the two groups of school leaders can also be explained by various structural factors. One could be that the Swedish school system has been reregulated in recent years – i.e. through a revised school law in 2011 – which reduces school leaders’ room for maneuver and keeps a high degree of conformity among the different school types. Another explanation might be found in well-developed professional norms that are shared among school leaders from both public and private school. Such norms may prevail over modern reform ideas as guidelines for school leaders’ practical work. Such an interpretation is in line with both Gold et al (2003) and Láurisdóttir (2014), who found that there is a resistance among school leaders from being influenced by “new managerialism”. Further, the selected school leaders in this study are all placed in the region of Stockholm, which is very competitive when it comes to the school sector. Perhaps this explains why the two categories of school leaders try to accommodate all the core values. Working in a competitive sector means that you have to act and react on many different arenas at the same time. In a future study, it would be interesting to compare school leaders in more competitive regions with those in less competitive ones. It is likely that school leaders in less competitive regions with smaller municipalities are more inclined to stress political control, in particular contacts with politicians (cf. Jarl 2012). Last, but not least, the result could of course be explained by the academic program itself. It is possible that our result is unique for school leaders attending the program, learning about the importance of core public values. To handle that

problem this study could be replicated with school leaders who have not attended the program.

Taken together, does it matter if the school is private or public for how school leaders perceive different core public values? The answer is, it depends.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> At present, there are about 1 550 school leaders working in Stockholm; around 780 in preschools, around 600 secondary schools, and around 175 in high schools (<http://siris.skolverket.se>). The turnover for school leaders (which constitutes about half of our sample) is around 30 percent each year (Sveriges skolledarförbund 2012). The turnover for preschool leaders is unknown. However, if we assume that also that figure is around 30 percent, about 460 school leaders is replaced each year, leaving us a total population of around 3 400 school leaders ( $1\,550 + 460 \times 4$ ).