The latitude for loyal contradiction and public leadership: a conceptual and comparative approach

Frits M. van der Meer

Public Administration, Comparative Public Sector and Civil Service Reform, Den Haag, The Netherlands and Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands, and

Gerrit S.A. Dijkstra

Public Administration, Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands

Abstract

Purpose – This paper looks into the mechanisms that determine (stimulate and limit) the scope for loyal contradiction in organizations through ex ante voice. The paper provides insights into how this essential civil service function and obligation can be maintained and the role that public leadership can play in addressing these issues.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper consists of a conceptual analysis of major determinants for constraints on and stimuli of loyal contradiction and provides an interpretational framework of the relevant factors involved.

Findings – This paper examines the mechanisms that determine (stimulate and limit) the scope for loyal contradiction in organizations through ex ante voice and provides insights into how to maintain this essential civil service function and obligation through the contribution of public leadership.

Practical implications – The findings of this paper offer insight into how to avoid constraints on loyal contradiction within public organizations and point to the way public leaders can, by facilitating and stimulating it, enhance organizational performance and legitimacy.

Originality/value – This paper points to an issue that is increasingly relevant in politics and public administration. By providing a conceptual framework, this paper provides a deeper understanding of how the necessary conditions for loyal contradiction can be created within public organizations.

Keywords Loyal contradiction, Political-administrative relationships, Appraisal, Public leadership, Organizational performance and legitimacy

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

Contemporary government depends on the involvement and input of an empowered, proactive and professional civil service (OECD, 2019). Paradoxically, the actual scope for public officials to express what we call *loyal contradiction* has come under pressure. However, since loyal contradiction is in most civil service systems considered essential for maintaining organizational performance and legitimacy, a limited latitude and scope will in the end be self-defeating for management and politics alike. Looking into the mechanisms that determine (stimulate and limit) the scope for loyal contradiction in organizations through internal *ex ante voice* provides insights into how to maintain this essential civil service function and responsibility. With respect to the latter point, a crucial issue concerns the role public leadership can play in addressing these issues. First, we define what is meant by loyal contradiction and its constituent components: internal *ex ante voice*, *appraisal* and *trust*. Relevant people and bodies to whom loyal contradiction is addressed are introduced. These include political officeholders, political institutions, the bureaucratic work environment (superiors and colleagues) and, last but not least, society. We then examine factors that can influence the latitude for loyal contradiction. These factors involve public officials not being allowed, willing or able to express such contradiction. Explanatory factors are: political-administrative culture, the effects of *new public management* (NPM), *mediacratization* and societal conditions and pressures. In order

to address these deficits in latitude for loyal contradiction, we discuss how favorable conditions for loyal contradiction can be created through the contributions of public leadership and thus provide an agenda for future comparative research.

Loyal contradiction and its constitutive elements: appraisal, voice and trust

Loyal contradiction, appraisal and voice are considered essential attributes for public officials in public administration and political science texts (Self, 1972). Parrhesia – to speak one's mind to leaders without fear – has historically been considered a public value (Paul, 2015). Wildavsky's dictum "speaking truth to power" is also used in this context (Wildavsky, 1979). The question remains of whose truth and what that truth consists of. Terms like loyal contradiction, appraisal, voice and trust need to be explained, as their meaning is not self-evident. When using the word *voice* the work and approach of Albert Hirschman *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* springs to mind (Hirschman, 1970). In a bureaucratic context, voice originates as a reaction to a perceived unsatisfactory situation, idea or proposed course of action. An actor with the capacity to exercise voice might not always use that capacity but might either exit the organization or stay, keep silent and conform to the situation, possibly for reasons of loyalty (Barry, 1974). That might imply either an active loyalty or more negatively, a withdrawal to one's own inner core by way of a silent migration. The voice option might involve whistle-blowing. In this paper, we look predominantly at internal *ex ante* voice instead of the external *ex post* voice as formulated by Hirschman. Voice, exit and loyalty are still within the established order. A point of controversy in some quarters is still the "allowability" of external *ex post* voice, given vital, strategic state and organizational interests. The question remains: who constructs, frames and decides what is considered strategic or vital and thus whether opinions and actions can be termed "sabotage" (O'Leary, 2006)?

The concept of "loyalty" carries positive overtones. However, the crucial question in this context is loyal (ty) to whom? To (political or bureaucratic) superiors, the organization or the public interest? Contradiction on the other hand has a more negative connotation. In regular usage, contradiction can seem to convey that the officer or official inappropriately contravenes the expressed and legitimate view and will of political and bureaucratic officials higher in the hierarchy. However, it has been a central line in academic writing since Second World War that absolute loyalty is not to be seen in a positive light (Von Borch, 1954; Peterson, 1966). A recent and extreme example of such loyalty can be found in the condoning by his supporters of undesirable presidential actions during Trump's last days in office. Contradiction strongly resembles voice. Voice is seen as a primary duty of public officials: officials have a duty to offer alternatives, counter- and even dissenting arguments, or to raise possible difficult and awkward questions in order to sharpen and improve a certain policy position, an implementation plan or practice or any other course of action proposed by their (political and administrative) leadership and colleague (Samier, 2001; Self, 1972). By formulating questions and looking for alternative courses of action, a mirror is shown to the person who has responsibility for that part of decision-making or implementation. The prime objective is to enhance the quality of a given course of action. "Quality" refers not only to certain desired standards and wishes of the decision-maker but also to improvements in serving the public interest. From a political and organizational perspective, voice can also support political and administrative survival in case of (internal and external) dangers.

So voice is not solely an (external) *ex post* phenomenon, as it is often conceived to be, but also, and even predominantly from a normative perspective, an internal *ex ante* obligation. Advice and opinions offered in this form remain only guidance and in the end leave the final say to the decision-maker, who may be better informed and more able to take the decision. That is in accordance with the Weberian model. Having said this, major difficulties are questions what sources and by what legitimizing authority the public officials provide these counter arguments and opinions. Do they spring from personally held convictions and

beliefs? Can they be rooted in a more "objective" public service professionalism with all its varied content, depending on the type of bureaucracy and the state system, model and its political administrative culture and traditions? Institutional design parameters thus influence the scope for loyal contradiction, appraisal and *ex ante* voice.

This idea of internal *ex ante* voice is connected to appraisal. Appraisal is understood to involve the weighing and giving of advice on policy alternatives by public officials to political officeholders. Appraisal is only one part of the picture: voice also includes the issue of loyal contradiction. The basic idea is that in order to be effective as a good public servant and also as a good "servant" to the political master of the day, the civil service leadership, immediate colleagues and/or the public, staff members have to (be able to) give their honest and frank opinions on policy and other organizational issues in order to let leadership know the possible positive and/or negative (side) effects of a certain course of action (Dijkstra and Van der Meer, 2018; Self, 1972).

Besides the elements mentioned above, one crucial and vital element in our analysis is still missing: trust/distrust. Trust is a basic requirement and precondition for accepting contradiction and causing it to be perceived as being in the loyal category. Trust prevents contradiction from being seen as overtly threatening to the position of the leadership or of fellow workers, or as damaging to the internal self-esteem and external appearance of actors. We return to this issue when discussing the need for saving personal and political "face". Confidentiality is therefore a crucial precondition for trust and loyal contradiction. However, trust in this context is not a one-sided relationship; it is of a reciprocal nature (Bouckaert, 2012). In particular Bouckaert's "T(rust) 3" conceptualization (*T3: Trust within the public sector*, Bouckaert, 2012, pp. 98–99) is relevant in this respect. Trust within the public sector. Trust between political officeholders and (top) bureaucrats. Trust between the administrative leadership and the rank and file and trust between co-workers on a horizontal level. Subordinates to political leaders and bureaucratic superiors should feel free to speak out without any dire consequences for their positions, careers or personal and mental wellbeing. Both the fear of these adverse personal consequences and the fear of the political and the administrative leadership losing face or experiencing a possible erosion or even loss of their position and survival inspire distrust and thus decrease the opportunity for and the acceptance of loyal contradiction.

Explanations of the latitude for loyal contradiction including appraisal through voice in civil service systems

A three-way subdivision of types of relationships is proposed, as relevant explanatory factors might vary accordingly:

(1) Between (mainly, but not only, senior and top) public officials on the one hand and political officeholders, their political advisors and appointees at relevant levels of government on the other.

(2) Internal hierarchical relationships within bureaucracy itself: between leaders and subordinates at all levels of the hierarchical chain.

(3) Horizontal relationships between colleagues at an equal hierarchical level within the organization.

At the same time, there are multiple forms in which a deficiency in expressing voice may take shape. Again, a triple division shows how and why loyal contradiction through internal *ex ante* voice might be impeded.

(1) Public officials not being allowed to express their opinion and concerns;

(2) Public officials not being willing to do so;

(3) Public officials not being able to do so.

On the basis of these classifications we present the following grid for analysis. In this paragraph we will propose a filling in of the empty cells in Table 1, in Tables 2, 3.

Table 1

The first limitation on loyal contradiction is caused by public officials not being allowed to express their professional points of view in the context of (appraisal and) loyal contradiction through internal *ex ante* voice toward political officeholders and other political representatives at various levels of government. A first explanation for this can be found in the personal disposition and behavioral tendencies of the (political and administrative) leadership of the day. In extreme cases, we could consider the actions of (rather pathological) authoritarian personalities, such as those elaborated in the "petty tyrant" concept described by Ashforth (1994) and developed later in an extensive branch of leadership studies. This impact of the (mis)use of political and bureaucratic authority on internal *ex ante* voice could also apply in the case of the administrative leadership being "dressed" in derived political authority or managerial autonomy (see our discussion on courtiership and also NPM below).

The effects of a more generic (societal) decline in routine public acceptance of the (political) authority of officeholders might increase situational uncertainty in the (political) leadership and thus increase the possibility of diminished confidence and trust in bureaucratic officials. This might also lead to a diminution of trust and, as a consequence, an anti-bureaucratic attitude amongst (weaker) political leaders. The level to which political officeholders do place trust in their bureaucratic service may differ according to:

(1) The personality of the officeholder;

(2) The nature (in both the structural and cultural dimensions) of the political administrative system;

(3) The level of politicization, both in a party-political and a policy-advisory perspective;

(4) The model of state (including political-administrative tradition) the political-administrative system belongs to.

Regarding not being allowed, personal and political face-saving and risk aversion as a short term mechanism connected with political survival may lead to the limiting of internal (bureaucratic) voice. The desire for personal face-saving is one of the relevant explanations for limited latitude, not only in the political–top bureaucratic relationship, but also in the hierarchical and horizontal relationships within bureaucracy. Apart from the personal traits of the political and administrative leadership and the institutional design elements discussed above, there are other factors which influence the "allowableness", permissibility and space for loyal contradiction. First, we have to direct our attention toward an

Table 1.
Limitations to loyal contradiction according to the direction of relationships and the nature of the limitations to loyal contradiction

Limitations to loyal contradiction /direction relationships	1 CSS – political leadership	2 CSS – administrative leadership	3 CSS – colleagues
A Not being allowed			
B Not willing			
C Not being able			

(increasing) short-term (performance) orientation in political officeholders as an explanatory factor. In classical PA and political science literature, the different time frames used by politicians and public officials have been seen as causing major differences in attitude and task-related motivation (Beneviste, 1972; Peters, 1988). Elections, with their specific time frames and the in-principle appointment-for-life of public officials, form one of the reasons for these differences. The validity of this line of reasoning is of course dependent on having a party-political neutral and, above all, permanent (senior) civil service. This is an important caveat. The permanency of the civil service and of the appointments of top officials, is deeply rooted in a Weberian or Westminster-style neutral civil service. We must not make this time frame distinction too absolute. The qualification "too absolute" has to do with the fixed terms of (not only top) public officials under NPM-related mobility schemes, as will be discussed below. Those fixed terms can diminish the autonomy and leeway (top) civil servants have to speak out.

The same can be said of the effects of "mediacratization" on government decision-making (Garland *et al.*, 2018). Media scrutiny of ministerial performance and crises do force political officeholders to concentrate on getting direct results and showing an impressive performance record. A similar media focus on political party action and performance, in combination with an intensifying parliamentary (formal) scrutiny of the executive, is driving political officeholders in the same direction. Likewise, societal pressure is pushing political officeholders in a similar direction: to go for quick action and results. The interconnected nature of all these aforementioned developments is conducive to an emphasis on short-term orientation (Van der Wal, 2017). In short, within this political orientation, it is quite understandable that loyal contradiction could easily be seen as an unnecessary and unwelcome obstacle hindering direct action, that must be avoided at all costs and in all instances. This applies equally to the bureaucratic leadership in relation to its immediate staff (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003; Wynen *et al.*, 2020). They too have to deliver, and they can use the cloak of political authority, as they are being located [ever?] closer to the hearts, ears and minds of political officeholders.

Finally, not being allowed to exert loyal contradiction with respect to horizontal relationships within an organization can be caused by an (over)emphasis on bureaucratic and professional autonomy. In addition, the need to preserve congenial working relationships is also an explanatory factor. With respect to the latter, the desire to preserve a treasured status quo, modus operandi and belief(s), at all levels of the hierarchy, can make challenging these "unallowable".

On the flip side of not-being-allowed is the dimension of not-being-willing to voice loyal contradiction as mentioned in our classification Table 1. Reasons for not-being-willing are being scared, trying to please superiors or otherwise not being disposed to speak. This attitude seems to be much closer to the classical – and as many thought, redundant and superseded – idea of the *bureaucratic personality* as formulated by Merton (1940). Bureaucrats would not, according to this line of reasoning, be the most entrepreneurial or outspoken of employees. In the formal, legal conceptualization of political-administrative relationships a bureaucrat performs the role of servant to a political officeholder whose wishes and ideas are considered paramount (Peters, 1988). This rather subservient position toward political officeholders finds its origins in the supposed authority, relationships and legitimacy of a bureaucrat's political position as having been given an "anointment" by the public and/or a supreme being. These factors would all be instrumental in shaping this postulated bureaucratic hesitancy to express loyal contradiction. The concept of the public servant that is used in this line of argumentation has an emphasis on a subservient role. That negative stereotype is in contrast with the also popular concept of an all-powerful servant using/appropriating his master's and society's powers. That idea was proposed by Weber in his concept of *Beamtenherrschaft* and reiterated in PA literature (Weber, 1921: 1976;

Raadschelders and Stillman, 2007). Current ideas of a proactive, empowered, professional, entrepreneurial public official operating autonomously and independently at different hierarchical ranks in his/her network setting in an emerging multilevel governance system serving politics, the public interest and society is different to the usurping power and the obedient servant perspectives (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2002; Van der Meer, 2009; Page and Jenkins, 2005).

And yet being proactive etc. does not necessarily imply that one is willing to speak out, either to the political leadership or to a higher authority in the bureaucratic chain, when confronted with the necessity of doing so. This not-being-willing attitude may be because that those public officials in the direct surroundings of political officeholders are under more direct scrutiny than others and are more open to political control (Christensen and Opstrup, 2017; Matheson *et al.*, 2007). Public officials operating at a greater distance from politics and the core department, for instance in implementation offices and agencies, might however enjoy a larger degree of autonomy where the leadership of those offices is concerned. With the decentralization of management responsibilities under the introduction of NPM, opportunity for greater managerial autonomy has increased. That autonomy does not necessarily extend to the rank and file. A (culture of) fear of reprisals could also diminish the leeway for loyal contradiction for employees lower in the chain of authority and thus reinforce a culture of defensive silence (Van Dyne *et al.*, 2003; Wynen *et al.*, 2020). This tendency is strengthened by an increased use of short-term and flexible contracts and a reduction in legal protections for employees, as seen for instance in employment-at-will schemes. A negative effect of this is a decrease in the upward flow of information within the organization. This information blockage can, ironically, threaten the position of political and senior bureaucratic officeholders.

Regarding the position and attitude of top public officials, we have remarked that public officials in the direct surroundings of political officeholders are under more direct scrutiny and are more open to political control and reprisals. Recent examples are plentiful and can, for example, be observed during the Trump presidency, the Brexit negotiations under Boris Johnson and the Netherlands' recent administrative crises in the welfare benefit system. In these circumstances preferred public official behavior as conforming courtiers (courtiership) is stimulated (Paul, 2015). Free-minded conversation at the top level can in this situation become restricted, stimulating group-think and the consequent possibility of the longer or shorter run of a political crisis (Janis, 1982). This is perhaps too negative a portrayal of reality. Situations may differ, and the personality aspect is also important here. Nevertheless, with the arrival of more managerially-inclined public officials, less independent top public officials have also arrived on the political administrative scene (Samier, 2001).

In addition to the arguments given above, we have also to mention the effects of politicization of a system. In particular, we must look at the number and roles of political appointees and members of ministerial cabinets and of other politicized support structures (Matheson *et al.*, 2007). It *could* be supposed that such a political support system could serve as an alternative source of internal *ex ante* voice that could provide for the need for loyal contradiction. But that depends on the nature of the political-administrative system (see for instance contrasting results in Ebinger *et al.*, 2019). To a varying degree, according to the pertinent political-administrative system design, the system can create a blockage between political officeholders and bureaucracy.

Last but not least, we must point to a third obstruction to internal *ex ante* voice: when public officials are unable to express opinions due to a deficiency of expertise, experience or political-administrative skills. This situation stems from the effects of NPM (Samier, 2001; Van der Meer, 2009). Privatization, agentification and lack of implementation expertise and practical field knowledge can impair the institutional capacity within a civil service system to deal with complex challenges (Cepiku and Savignon, 2012). Inadequate understanding of field and implementation issues thus implies less available information that can be used to support

a civil servant's ability to express voice and loyal contradiction. Finally, as a result of NPM in the wake of retrenchment policies from the 1980s, cuts have been made to the civil service, particularly reducing staffing levels and investment in training budgets. These budget cuts have put the bureaucracy under even more pressure, causing them to develop deficiencies in important expertise or even for such expertise to (largely) disappear. Once again, this implies that the required level of expertise needed for (loyal) contradiction is under pressure.

Returning to the issue of trust and confidentiality, it is important, with respect to voice and appraisal being heard, that such expressions must be made behind closed doors, as openness may have a negative effect on the willingness of the "sender" to speak and of the "receiver" to listen. Currently in many countries, a new wave of initiatives has been and is being developed, directed at fostering greater government transparency through open government initiatives (OECD, 2019), but there are major drawbacks. The result may be that within the civil service more and more officials refrain and, moreover, are encouraged to refrain from voicing their professional opinions. The same applies to the potential receivers of these messages. After all, these views can easily reach the media, sometimes after legal intervention on the basis of open government acts. Of course, contradiction in an oral form is always still possible, but it must be clear that from the point of view of the organization this legislation has negative aspects, given the fleeting and ephemeral nature of such contradiction.

In conclusion to this transparency issue, public officials openly expressing their particular opinions, when those views are contrary of those of the political officeholders, have always been dealt with in a resolute way, given the negative external consequences for the political officeholders in the media, society and other political quarters. Thus legislation directed at introducing an almost absolute degree of transparency in government decision-making – particularly in the phases before an official document is issued – would be detrimental to civil service voice, appraisal and loyal contradiction, as the expression and reception of that voice would be inhibited by the fear of those external consequences. Public officials would then become more careful in expressing their opinions and political officeholders in asking for or accepting them. This underlines the importance of strong official legal protection for public officials. Paradoxically, overemphasizing transparency will limit attempts to enhance the quality of public service delivery and decision-making.

In Table 2 we present a summary of the limitations discussed above:

Table 2
Table 2 points to major challenges to the latitude for loyal contradiction to political and bureaucratic leadership at various hierarchical levels. Political and administrative leaders must not only face up to these challenges but also actively incentivize the creation of safe environments for loyal contradiction. In Table 2 we have outlined three important dimensions that help our understanding of possible restraints on the latitude for articulating loyal contradiction. These restraining factors center on impediments in the categories of admissibility (not being allowed), willingness (not being willing) and ability (not being able) as elaborated in Table 2. On the flip side, they can also serve as starting points for an assessment of ways in which the political and the bureaucratic leadership can create a safe environment for staff members to express their opinions and concerns. By venting opinions that at first might conflict with the dominant way of thinking, staff can ultimately improve the quality of decision-making. Quality in this respect refers to both substantive policy matters and issues of democratic governance. The implications for leadership actions and initiatives therefore do not only pertain to the removal of obstacles to loyal contradiction but also to the proactive fostering of these internal voice activities. Real leadership thus entails organizing (loyal) contradiction. Central to this idea is the necessity of stimulating staff's willingness to engage in contradiction without fear of reprisal. Staff members are to be encouraged to speak truth to their political and administrative superiors. This involves

Nature of limitations to loyal contradiction /direction relationships	1 CSS – political leadership		2 CSS – administrative leadership		3 CSS – colleagues	
A not being allowed	(1)	Risk aversion and short decision-making- given a need for political survival	(1)	Risk aversion and short decision-making- given need for administrative survival and	(1)	Emphasis on bureaucratic and professional autonomy
	(2)	Preserving a treasured *status quo*, *modus operandi* and beliefs	(2)	Courtier-ship to political and bureaucratic leadership	(2)	The need for preserving congenial working relationships
			(3)	Preserving a treasured *status quo*, *modus operandi* and beliefs	(3)	Preserving a treasured *status quo*, *modus operandi* and beliefs
B Not willing	(1)	Political survival and preservation	(1)	Administrative survival and preservation	(1)	Organizational survival and self-preservation
	(2)	Culture of fear	(2)	Culture of fear	(2)	Culture of fear
	(3)	Courtier-ship to political and bureaucratic leadership	(3)	Courtiership to political and bureaucratic leadership	(3)	Emphasis on bureaucratic and professional autonomy
					(4)	The need for preserving congenial working relationships
C Not being able	(1)	Deficient expertise	(1)	Deficient expertise	(1)	Deficient expertise
	(2)	Deficient organizational and moral courage	(2)	Deficient organizational and moral courage	(2)	Deficient organizational and moral courage
	(3)	Lack of access to political leadership given structural and cultural limitations	(3)	Lack of access to administrative leadership given structural and cultural limitations	(3)	Lack of access to colleagues given structural and cultural limitations

Table 2.
The nature of limitations to loyal contradiction according to the direction of relationships and colleagues (3)

enhancing and maintaining an appropriate level of administrative, internal bureaucratic and moral courage. Thus, an open and diverse organizational culture of trust and candor may be established. Cultivating a high standard of (professional and bureaucratic) expertise can provide for the ability requirements. In essence, it is a crucial task of political-administrative leadership not only to create a healthy work environment but also to empower civil servants and develop a more proficient, citizen-oriented public service delivery (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2002; Hassan *et al.*, 2018). Being better informed of consequences and possible alternatives, officeholders, superiors or colleagues may still choose to (partially) reject any offered opinions on grounds of policy, political expediency or other considerations. What has been said in relation to the hierarchical leadership also applies to a shared and horizontal concept of organizational leader-ship, in which emphasis is placed on creating a shared sense of mutual responsibility. This can encourage the emergence of willingness and ability to take responsibility for (common) organizational and societal goals. It thus also requires enhancing and maintaining an appropriate level of (inter)collegial relationships and moral courage. These conditions are shown in Table 3.

Possibilities to enhance loyal contradiction/ direction relationships	1 CSS- political leadership	2 CSS- administrative leadership	3 CSS- colleagues
A Allowed	(1) Enhancing a willingness to take risks and long-term perspective (2) Speaking truth to (political) powers is allowed and encouraged (3) Creating a culture of political –administrative trust and candor (4) Encouraging challenges to the given *status quo*, *modus operandi* and beliefs	(1) Enhancing a willingness to take risks and long-term perspective (2) Speaking truth to (administrative) powers is allowed and encouraged (3) Creating a culture of trust and candor within the hierarchical dimensions of bureaucracy (4) Encouraging challenges to the given *status quo*, *modus operandi* and beliefs	(1) Putting emphasis on shared responsibility and critical and open mutual responsibilities (2) Emphasis on the mutual responsibility for attaining the goals of the organization (3) Creating a culture of trust and candor within the horizontal dimensions of bureaucracy (4) Encouraging challenges to the given *status quo*, *modus operandi* and beliefs
B Willing	(1) Stimulating an open culture for, by and through critical, proactive and open political officeholders and (top) public officials (2) Developing and selecting "strong" and cooperative personalities within both the political and administrative leadership (3) Encouraging and facilitating and willingness to take responsibility for political, organizational and societal goals	(1) Stimulating an open culture for, by and through critical, proactive and open public officials within the hierarchy (2) Developing and selecting "strong" and cooperative personalities within the civil service system (3) Encouraging and facilitating a willingness to take responsibility for organizational and societal goals	(1) Stimulating an open culture for, by and through critical, proactive and collegial public officials (2) Developing and selecting "strong" and cooperative personalities within bureaucracy (3) Encouraging and facilitating a willingness to take responsibility for shared organizational and societal goals
C Able	(1) Enhancing and maintaining an appropriate level of (professional and political administrative) expertise (2) Enhancing and maintaining an appropriate level of political, administrative and moral courage (3) Creating and providing adequate access to political leadership by removing given structural and cultural limitations	(1) Enhancing and maintaining an appropriate level of (professional and bureaucratic) expertise (2) Enhancing and maintaining an appropriate level of administrative, internal bureaucratic and moral courage (3) Creating and providing adequate access to political leadership by removing given structural and cultural limitations	(1) Enhancing and maintaining an appropriate level of professional and bureaucratic) expertise (2) Enhancing and maintaining an appropriate level of (inter) collegial relationships and moral courage (3) Creating and providing access to colleagues by removing given structural and cultural limitations

Table 3.
How to enhance loyal contradiction according to the direction of relationships within civil service systems

Table 3

Conclusion

Central to this research has been a discussion of factors determining the latitude of public officials for expressing (loyal) contradiction to political officials, administrative leadership and colleagues through internal *ex ante* voice. In our research, loyal contradiction has been discussed in terms of appraisal, *ex ante* voice and trust. We have introduced a triple distinction with respect to the nature of obstacles to loyal contradiction: namely public officials not being allowed, not being willing and/or not being able to provide (loyal) contradiction. Loyal contradiction is not only addressed to the political and bureaucratic leadership and its constituent parts but also to fellow workers within the bureaucratic service. The relevant reasons that the latitude accorded public officials might be limited, or even still be diminishing, vary according to this double triptych.

That latitude is determined by personal characteristics of relevant actors, political and societal pressures leading to short-term decision-making, NPM practices, mediacratization and risk aversion due to the imperative for political and bureaucratic survival. Officials may also refrain from loyal contradiction and hide in a defensive silence for a variety of reasons, such as fear of professional reprisals. More short-term contracts and a lower degree of legal protection for employees, as found for instance in employment-at-will schemes, can have a negative effect. A more self-gratifying variant of employee silence is to be found in officials trying to please the leadership and each other for personal benefits, either for personal gain or psychological gratification. Finally, public officials may not be able to express opinions due to deficiencies in expertise, experience or political-administrative skills.

As a mirror image we have presented conditions favoring loyal contradiction. Regarding "allowability" and "willingness", we referred in Table 3 to preconditions such as creating trust and limiting distrust amongst relevant actors and facilitating an open culture and discourse through empowerment of officials and employees. In essence, it is a crucial political and administrative leadership role and task not only to create a healthy work environment but also to enhance a more proficient, citizen-oriented public service delivery.

Having said this, the factors comprising Tables 1–3 are (of course) not ubiquitous in all political-administrative and societal systems, given the variations particular to different systems at different times. But they can be helpful as a heuristic tool for understanding the mechanisms behind the latitude for loyal contradiction and serve as an agenda for future comparative research.

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Corresponding author
Frits M. van der Meer can be contacted at: f.m.van.der.meer@fgga.leidenuniv.nl