

Life at the top:
Understanding top bureaucrats' roles
as the link between politics and
administration

Amalie Trangbæk

Life at the top:
Understanding top bureaucrats' roles
as the link between politics and
administration

PhD Dissertation

Politica

© Forlaget Politica and the author 2021

ISBN: 978-87-7335-285-4

Cover: Svend Siune

Print: Fællestrykkeriet, Aarhus University

Layout: Annette Bruun Andersen

Submitted August 31, 2021

The public defense takes place December 10, 2021

Published December 2021

Forlaget Politica

c/o Department of Political Science

Aarhus BSS, Aarhus University

Bartholins Allé 7

DK-8000 Aarhus C

Denmark

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	9
Chapter 1. Introduction.....	13
1.1 Research question and context.....	13
1.2 The structure of the dissertation.....	15
Chapter 2. Theory.....	17
2.1 Practices and roles of civil servants	19
2.2 Assumptions about behaviour.....	26
2.3 Interaction with other actors.....	29
2.4 Skills and crafts.....	31
Chapter 3. Methodological framework	35
3.1 Methodology and logic of inquiry	35
3.2 Research criteria in interpretive studies	37
3.3 Sampling	39
3.4 Data generation	43
3.5 Collecting qualitative data during the pandemic	60
3.6 Transcription and analysis	61
Chapter 4. Context: The Danish Central Administration.....	65
4.1 Government formation	65
4.2 The guiding principles of the Danish state administration	66
4.3 The structure of ministries	67
ANALYSIS PART 1	73
Chapter 5. Work for the sake of what? The imperatives of permanent secretaries ..	75
5.1 Make the minister succeed.....	75
5.2 Protect the minister	79
5.3 Manage the ministry	82
5.4 Conclusion.....	84
ANALYSIS PART 2: UPWARDS	85
Chapter 6. Relation to minister	87
6.1 Loyalty	87
6.2 Trust.....	89
6.3 Chemistry	95
6.4 Saying ‘no’ to the minister	98
6.5 Conclusion.....	100
Chapter 7. Providing counsel	103
7.1 Counsel on party politics.....	103
7.2 Political-tactical advice	106
7.3 <i>Fachwissen</i> advice	117
7.4 Communication.....	124

7.5 The minister's expectations.....	127
7.6 Conclusion	131
Chapter 8. Meetings	133
8.1 Before meetings	133
8.2 During meetings.....	137
8.3 After meetings	149
8.4 Conclusion.....	151
Chapter 9. Policy development.....	153
9.1 Identifying political problems and political visions.....	153
9.2 Converting political vision to policy solutions.....	162
9.3 Conclusion	168
Chapter 10. The executive triangle: minister, permanent secretary and special advisor.....	169
10.1 What does a special advisor do?	169
10.2 The relation between permanent secretary and special advisor	180
10.3 Are special advisors here to stay?	185
10.4 Conclusion	187
ANALYSIS PART 3: DOWNWARDS.....	189
Chapter 11. Linking minister and ministry	191
11.1 Understanding the minister	191
11.2 The uncontrollable calendar	200
11.3 Conclusion.....	202
Chapter 12. Managing the ministry.....	203
12.1 Ensure a strong organization.....	203
12.2 Day-to-day management	206
12.3 The difference between permanent secretary and head of division	216
12.4 Conclusion	221
Chapter 13. Case handling	223
13.1 Practices of preparing cases	224
13.2 Priorities during case preparation.....	225
13.3 Case handling practices	231
13.4 Conclusion	235
ANALYSIS PART 4: OUTWARDS.....	237
Chapter 14. The group of permanent secretaries	239
14.1 Collaboration among the permanent secretaries	239
14.2 Hierarchy	250
14.3 Conclusion	256
Chapter 15. Preparatory Government Committee meetings	257
15.1 Before the preparatory government committee meeting	258
15.2 The preparatory government committee meetings	259

15.3 After the preparatory government committee meetings	271
15.4 Government committee meetings.....	273
15.5 Conclusion	276
Chapter 16. Media	277
16.1 The permanent secretary's own media appearance.....	286
16.2 Conclusion.....	288
Chapter 17. Interest organizations	291
17.1 Why collaborate with interest organizations?.....	291
17.2 Collaboration in practice	295
17.3 Conclusion	301
Chapter 18. Conclusion and contribution.....	303
18.1 Practices.....	304
18.2 Roles	307
18.3 Generalizability	310
18.4 Contributions	314
18.5 A final point on Sir Humphrey and Niels	319
References	321
Appendix A: Topic guides	331
Appendix B: Guidelines for transcription.....	339
Appendix C: Coding scheme	341
English summary	371
Dansk resumé.....	375

Acknowledgements

Unconsciously, I might have been preparing myself for this project 11 years ago, when I did my first observations in a Danish ministry. I won a competition in the Ministry of Science where I argued why research is important. The prize was a day accompanying the minister, Charlotte Sahl-Madsen, and had I known what the future would bring, I might have taken better notes. I do remember being surprised about the extent of the machinery of the ministry. While I knew civil servants assist the minister, I was still surprised to discover how much is happening behind the scenes. A minister cannot do her job without assistance from the ministry. Similarly, while it is my name on this dissertation, I could not have done it on my own. It required a lot of help and support from colleagues, friends, and family.

First and foremost, I want to thank my supervisor Jens Blom-Hansen and co-supervisor Peter Bjerre Mortensen. Thank you for your guidance and support; for believing in me and my project; for always being curious and open to the new methodological paths I wanted to explore; for helping me gain access to the central administration; for your inputs and thoughts on my ideas; for making sure I always remembered the most central references, such as Page and Jenkins; for reminding me that papers are not a detective story, so I should put my findings early; and finally for reading an insane amount of pages and providing constructive feedback. I have learned a lot from you. Jens, thank you for encouraging me to pursue this path and for always taking the time to discuss anything and everything. I really appreciate your patience, your encouragement and the walk-and-talks. Peter, thank you for your honesty and for always bringing a new perspective to my writings. Thank you for insisting that I needed to move forward and for giving hands-on advice such as: “There is a time to think and a time to write. Now is the time to write.”

Thanks to all the permanent secretaries for engaging with me, for being curious on the project and for trusting me enough to provide access to observations. I think it is unique to live in a country where the top civil servants are willing to and prioritize to participate in a research project in a busy everyday life with a densely packed work schedule. Thank you to the ministers and the head of sections who participated in interviews, and to all of the people who helped me, answered my questions and took an interest in my project during my fieldwork. Last but not least I want to thank all the employees in the secretariats of the minister. Thank you for assisting me with planning fieldwork and interviews. Thank you for showing me to the coffee machine (and teaching me to drink coffee), for unravelling the abbreviations in the central administration, for printing the permanent secretaries calendar again and again, for

taking an interest in my project, and for helping me to find a seat in the meeting rooms. Your work is crucial, yet invisible to the public.

Thanks to my assessment committee Helle Ørsted Nielsen, Paul ‘t Hart and Richard Shaw for reading and providing valuable comments on the dissertation. I also want to thank you, Paul ‘t Hart, for the effort to arrange a stay abroad during the pandemic. While it ended up as a stay-at-home stay abroad, your valuable feedback and suggestions have been central to the final dissertation.

Thanks to the section of Public Administration for commenting on my drafts and for taking an interest in my project. Thanks to Jørgen Grønnegaard Christensen for reading and commenting on several chapters during the summer. Thanks to Heidi Houlberg Salomonsen for introducing me to international colleagues; for discussing the news, theoretical perspectives on civil servants and work-life-balance; and for being a role model within academia. I also want to thank Erik-Jan van Dorp for discussions and for reading and commenting on my work. I look forward to many more discussions on top civil servants and the craft of qualitative methods. Thanks to Kristine Nørby Jakobsen and Anders Troels Attermann for carefully transcribing hours and hours of interviews.

I also want to thank all my PhD colleagues. Thank you for four years of PhD-friendship; for keeping me company at the countless visits to the ECPR Methods Schools; for walk-and-talks around the lake; for going to the Natural History Museum for ice cream during our ‘stolen spring’ (or summer, I may add); for coffee breaks – even before I drank coffee; for support and encouragement; for professional back-and-forth, laughter and academic procrastination (yes, it is a thing); for discussions on anything and everything; for dancing until the early hours and for giving the regular customers at ‘Podiet’ a night to remember. A special thank goes to Alexander Vonebjerg-Grundholm, Ane Karoline Bak Foged, Andreas Bengtsson, Anne-Sofie Greisen Højlund, Anne Kirstine Rønn (AK), Arzoo Rafiqi, Dani May, Didde Boysen, Emil Bargmann Madsen, Emily Sundqvist, Emily Rose Tangsgaard, Jakob Majlund Holm, Jonas Gejl Kaas, Julian Christensen, Karoline Kolstad, Kirstine Karmsteen, Lasse Schmidt Hansen, Lauritz Aastrup Munch, Lisa Hirsch, Liv Frank, Maiken Gelardi, Mathilde Cecchini, Mathilde Langgaard, Mathilde Albertsen Winsløw, Matilde Jeppesen, Marie Kaldahl, Mette Bisgaard, Nanna Vestergaard Ahrensberg, Niels Nyholt, Nikolaj Andersen, Rikke Kolding, Sarah Yde Junge, Stefan Boye, Steffen Selmer Andersen, Thomas Kristensen, Trine Høj Fjendbo and Vilde Lunnan Djuve.

A special thanks to my office mates who have kept me company during the past four years. Thank you, Alexander, for introducing me to life as a PhD, for insisting that I chose a reference tool, and for introducing me to Winter School

and Schlenkerla. It was always fun to share an office with you. Thank you, Karoline, for coffee breaks, for interesting discussions on everything from public administration to holiday plans, for ensuring that we celebrated the victories (big and small) and for always taking an interest in my project. Your work morale is impressive and I learned a lot from you. A special thanks for your support during the last months of writing the PhD. Thank you, Matilde, for sharing the home office during the lock-down. Thank you for the coffee breaks, for fits of laughter, for lunch discussions and the smallest dance party within history. Last, but not least, I want to thank Marie. Despite being in different research sections, we quickly realized we had a lot in common, especially our interest in what was going on at Slotsholmen. When we began to share an office I had no idea I would not only get an office mate but also a close friend. Thank you for reading and commenting on my dissertation, for endless amounts of encouragement and support, for all the fun times, for dining experiences, and for literally being by my side through good and difficult times. I could not have done this without you.

Thank you Karoline and Sarah for all our discussions on public administration and for much-needed breaks discussing everything else but that. Thank you to Ane, Mathilde C. and Mette for guidance, tips, and discussions on the craft of qualitative research and data collection. I feel very lucky that friendship has grown out of being colleagues. Mathilde C., your kindness and willingness to help is invaluable. Thank you for taking calls at all hours when I felt like Bambi on ice while trying to conduct qualitative analysis, for checking up on me and for encouraging me to move forward.

I also want to thank Audrey Gagnon, Larissa Versloot, Lene Guercke, and Jenny Rademann for sharing your research with me, for reading drafts, providing comments, and keeping my spirit up. I have enjoyed our discussions and meetings a lot.

I also want to thank the technical and administrative staff at the department: Annette Bruun Andersen, Birgit Kanstrup, Helle M.H. Bundgaard, Ida Warburg, Lene Hjøllund, Line Kjær Vesterbæk, Malene Poulsen, Natasha Elizabeth Perera, Njall Beuschel, Ruth Ramm, and Susanne Vang. Also thank you to John Jay Neufeld for editing the dissertation. A special thanks to Ruth for patiently handling my invoices from fieldwork and interviews, to Njall for keeping the spirit high during coffee breaks, and to Annette and Natasha for proofreading the final chapters of my dissertation with short notice.

Finally, I want to thank a group of friends who continuously reminded me about the important things outside of academia. First, thank you to Marie Pedersen and Victoria Bonderup Steffensen. Thank you for always being there for me, for cheering on me and for taking an interest in my project. Thank you for all the laughter, interesting conversations, travels, festivals, trips to the

weekend cottage, for exploring different cuisines, for countless card games and for always broadening my horizons. You are amazing and inspiring and I truly admire you both. Our friendship means the world to me. Thank you to Isabella Braagaard Pedersen, Linette Knudsen and Josefine Nordmark Nielsen for supporting me, for distracting me and for reminding me that there are other things in life than writing a PhD. Thank you to Britt Frøslev Christensen, Emilie Christensen, Maj Helbo Storgaard, Mette Christine Mortensen and Johanne Søndergaard for being an important part of my study life, for cheering on me and for sharing ups-and-downs. Thank you to Christian Ulrich Eriksen, Gwen Jens Gruner-Widding and Stine Krause for squeezing in squad coffee breaks between interviews, for supporting me and for always having a positive attitude. Being with you is always fun.

A special thank you to Gitte Lund. Thank you for walks and talks, for the kind and encouraging texts, for the greetings and gifts in the secret room and for supporting me during this process. To my brother, Christian, I want to thank you for making me laugh and for always keeping me sharp on my methods (with your more or less sceptic questions). Thank you for always cheering on me and for discussing my results. To my parents, Anne and Søren, I want to thank you for always being there for me, for believing in me and supporting me – also during the writing of this dissertation. Thank you for always encouraging me to pursue whatever goal I wanted. Thank you for always taking an interest in my work, for taking the time to hear me out when I talked about my newest idea, and for engaging in discussions of news pieces about civil servants. Thank you for providing moral support and for talking with me on the phone for as long as I needed, when I was in over my head. You are my role models.

Amalie Trangbæk
Aarhus, November 2021

Chapter 1.

Introduction

Top civil servants are often described as ‘shadow people’ because they rarely figure in the public domain. They are the link between the political level and the administrative level. Hence, top civil servants are close collaborators of politicians and are ubiquitous in politics. They influence our society and everyday life through their decisions and professional advice to politicians, other civil servants, and external actors. Nevertheless, we only know little about top civil servants’ work life. The aim of this dissertation is to advance our understanding of the role of top civil servants in the political process based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork in the Danish central administration.

In television, top civil servants are often depicted as either power hungry and sly or unimportant with no agency. Take, for example, the British TV series ‘Yes Minister’ where the Permanent Secretary Sir Humphrey gives the minister the impression that the minister is in charge while he is pulling the strings and making decisions behind the minister’s back. Another example is the Danish TV series ‘Borgen’ where we follow the newly elected Prime Minister in Denmark, Birgitte Nyborg. In the series, her Permanent Secretary Niels is unobtrusive, actually almost invisible. He asks a lot of questions but rarely provides substantial advice or takes initiative on his own – just the opposite of how Sir Humphry is portrayed in ‘Yes Minister’. However, as this dissertation will show, neither of these depictions captures the complex role of permanent secretaries.

1.1 Research question and context

The role of top bureaucrats is usually considered to be on a continuum from a very clear separation of tasks between politicians and bureaucrats on the one end to the complete merging of the roles on the other end (Aberbach, Putnam, & Rockman, 1981; Wille, 2013a). The fear of having a Sir Humphrey-fied civil service where politicians are reduced to figureheads has existed for a long time (Weber, [1922] 1993), and scholars have, therefore, studied top civil servants for a long time as well. This has led to prosopographical studies of top civil servants’ background (Putnam, 1976) and career studies showing how they got their position (Bach & Veit, 2018). There are also studies focusing on separate practices such as note writing (Mangset & Asdal, 2019), special advisors’ impact on the civil servants’ relation with the minister (Öhberg, Christiansen, & Niklasson, 2016), and different strategies to handle the media (Grube, 2019).

However, research investigating the everyday life of top civil servants – their practices and roles – remains scarce (Noordegraaf, 2000; Rhodes, 2011; E. J. van Dorp & 't Hart, 2019). Do permanent secretaries act as interpreters, messengers, or opinion formers when they communicate with the political and administrative level? How do they navigate between the formal and informal norms? And how do permanent secretaries perceive themselves and their colleagues? These are all important questions because the practices and roles of permanent secretaries can influence the political process and hence decisions as well their implementation. Thus, their behaviour can affect the lives of citizens.

This dissertation investigates these questions based on curiosity about top bureaucrats' work and their everyday life. The abovementioned gives rise to the following research question:

What constitutes the practices and roles of top civil servants?

The research question consists of two parts: practices and roles. A practice can be seen as a set of actions, often displaying a pattern, and '... consists simply of what a group of people do, and the unintended consequences of these actions' (Rhodes, 2011, p. 4). Therefore, a study of top bureaucrats' practices focuses on what they actually do – i.e. which meetings they attend, whom they meet with, how they act during meetings, etc. – whereas roles are the different positions with which one can act in accordance. These roles all have some inherent practices that one is expected to or will act in accordance with to fulfil the specific role.

Sir Humphrey and Niels are both permanent secretaries – the most senior civil servants within a ministry, i.e. the ones at the highest level in the hierarchy. As the link between the political level and the administrative level, permanent secretaries – more specifically permanent secretaries in the Danish central administration – can be considered key actors and are thus the focus of this dissertation. In Denmark, the position of permanent secretary is the highest-ranking bureaucratic position, making permanent secretaries the bottleneck and the link between the administrative and the political level (see Chapter 4 for a detailed description of the Danish central administration).

Investigating the everyday practices and roles of permanent secretaries requires in-depth studies such as diary studies, interviews, and observations. Hence, this dissertation is based on an ethnographic study combining observational studies in the form of shadowing with in-depth interviews. Although it is challenging to get this type of empirical material because it is difficult to negotiate access and very resource demanding to conduct, this approach has enabled me to shed light on the practices and roles that are not immediately

available to the public. Because of the limited research within the area, I use an abductive logic of inquiry, where the interplay between theory and empirical data guides the analysis. I will elaborate on this in the methods chapter

The main contribution of this dissertation is the insight into the everyday life of permanent secretaries that I provide, including the excerpts from fieldwork and the quotes from interviews. This empirical material provides a nuanced perspective on what permanent secretaries actually do, and illustrates that permanent secretaries navigate between several practices and roles. In the conclusion, I point to five characteristic practices: cohering, connecting, coordinating, delegating, and protecting, along with three overall roles: being the minister's right-hand man, advisor, and CEO of the ministry. These illustrate the diversity in the everyday life as a top civil servant.

Finally, I return to the theoretical take-away points, including how my analysis indicates that the permanent secretaries resemble stewards more than agents and how the role division seems to be continuously in development. I also suggest two subcategories to functional politicization: *Uncritical functional politicization* and *Reflexive functional politicization*. Finally, I turn to the special advisors and how civil servants may also be able to affect their counselling.

1.2 The structure of the dissertation

The dissertation consists of 18 chapters. In Chapter 2, I present the theoretical framework of my study, which combines theoretical insight on the role division between politicians and civil servants, the behaviour of civil servants, and the skills of civil servants. Then I present the methodologic framework (Chapter 3), which includes reflections on the research design, the abductive approach, the collection of empirical material, and the coding process. This chapter also includes reflections on getting access, my positionality, the trustworthiness of my data, and reflections on collecting qualitative material during a pandemic. This is followed by a description of the context in Chapter 4, namely the Danish central administration. It includes the organization of the ministries and two guiding principles for the organization of the ministries: *ressortprincippet* and *ministerstyret*.

I will then move on to the analysis, which consists of 13 chapters divided into four parts. Part 1 is an introductory analytical chapter (Chapter 5) describing three objectives of permanent secretaries.

Part 2 of the analysis encompasses five chapters on the permanent secretary's relation upwards, i.e. towards the minister. Chapter 6 describes the permanent secretary's relation to the minister, focusing on the importance of trust and chemistry. Afterwards, Chapter 7 describes the counselling practices

of the permanent secretary, including a description of various types of counselling. Then Chapter 8 describes the practices at meetings, including ‘the turning head practice’ and the expectations for the permanent secretary’s role during various meetings. In Chapter 9, policy development, I describe the different steps from idea to enactment of policy. This is followed by Chapter 10, which delves into permanent secretaries’ relation with the special advisor. It includes reflections on the role as special advisor and the collaboration between the permanent secretary, the minister, and the special advisor.

Part 3 focuses on the permanent secretary’s relation downwards and consists of three chapters on the permanent secretary’s relation to other civil servants in the ministry. Chapter 11 concerns the importance of linking the ministry and the minister. This is followed by Chapter 12, which accounts for the permanent secretary’s role as manager of the ministry, including notions on the collaboration with other senior civil servants. The next topic is the permanent secretary’s case handling (Chapter 13), which includes what the permanent secretary pays attention to when reading a case and how the cases rise through the hierarchy.

The fourth and final part of the analysis concerns the permanent secretary’s relation outwards and consists of four chapters. In Chapter 14, I describe the permanent secretaries’ relation to one another. It includes reflections on both the official and unofficial meeting forums, and on the coordination happening among them. This is followed by Chapter 15, which describes the preparatory government committees. It concerns the norms and practices during these meetings and the importance of attending these meetings. Chapter 16 is about how and when the permanent secretaries are involved in handling the media, but it also includes the reasons why they prefer to stay out of the limelight. The last chapter in the analysis, Chapter 17, describes permanent secretaries’ relation with interest organisations and touches upon why a continuous contact is important and how it can benefit both the minister and ministry.

After the analysis, Chapter 18 concludes this dissertation. In this chapter, I conclude on the empirical findings, and discuss how it can contribute to the existing literature and future research.

Chapter 2. Theory

A TOOLBOX OF THEORIES. Before presenting the theoretical frame of this dissertation, I will briefly comment on the role of theory in this study. Upon beginning my work, I had no clear theoretical hypothesis that I was interested in testing. Nor had I any aim to construct new hypotheses or theoretical claims rooted only in my empirical material. Instead, I brought with me to the field a toolbox consisting of various theories and insights from previous studies, which I used to examine and understand what I observed in the field (Cecchini, 2018). Thus, I used theories as tools when asking questions, when deciding what to note down during fieldwork, and when trying to make sense of the empirical material (see section on coding). In this process, I searched for the theoretical tool that could best help me to understand what was going on in the empirical setting. The theories in my toolbox were not always enough, and I had to return to my desk in search for other theories capable of better grasping my observations. Hence, part of the theoretical framework was added quite late, because none of the existing tools in the toolbox would resonate with the empirical material. This back-and-forth movement between theory and empirical material is an abductive process of inquiry that can be useful when working with observations (W. J. Wilson & Chaddha, 2009). The theoretical framework that I present in this chapter is thus the result of the entire research process and not just the initial theoretical work and toolbox. I could have chosen different tools (i.e., theories) with which to investigate different aspects of the practices and roles of top civil servants. And when reading the excerpts, you might think that other tools could have been applied to that excerpt as well. To avoid ‘jumping to conclusions’, I made sure to be reflexive and challenged my initial interpretations and choice of theoretical tools (see methods chapter). Moreover, because I did not have any specific hypotheses in mind, I could still be open to encounters that I did not pre-empt or topics I did not initially think to cover, which allowed me to utilize the richness of the empirical material, not least the observations.

Theoretical concepts also played another role in this study due to the particularities of the empirical setting. In Denmark, many civil servants in general, and permanent secretaries in particular, have an educational background in political science. Hence, part of the theoretical framework laid out here was also directly present in the minds of the group under study, and sometimes it also seemed to be triggered by my presence. From time to time, Weber’s name was mentioned along with the Danish Code VII (2015), which are written

norms about the behaviour of civil servants rooted in, among other things, the Weberian civil servant. Hence, the tools I brought to the field were sometimes known by the actors in the field, meaning that they also reflected on their own role in this context. In that sense, the ‘experience-distant’ concepts presented in this chapter were also ‘experience-near concepts’ and part of the research participants’ lifeworld (F. C. Schaffer, 2015).

LITERATURE ON CIVIL SERVANTS. ‘Civil servant’ or ‘bureaucrat’ is often used as an umbrella term covering different types of civil servants: street-level bureaucrats/frontline workers (e.g. Lipsky, [1980] 2010; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003), middle-ranking civil servants (e.g. Page, 2012; Page & Jenkins, 2007), and top civil servants/senior civil servants (e.g. Rhodes, 2011; 't Hart & Wille, 2006) are frequently used subtypes. Their tasks vary significantly, however, so not everything might be equally transferrable from one group of civil servants to other civil servants. The amount of research on these subgroups differs, however, as does the grouping within the different subtypes; who is considered to be included in top civil servants? There are very different solutions to this in the literature. This chapter includes theory and studies on civil servants in general and on top civil servants more specifically, because some of the general notions on civil servants arguably also apply to top civil servants.

UPWARDS, DOWNWARDS, OUTWARDS. Top civil servants navigate a complex environment, where they do not only ‘manage down’, as is often the case if one is managing an organization. Instead, their attention points in three different directions: they manage upwards to the minister, downwards to the civil service, and outwards to external stakeholders such as interest organizations, the media, and civil servants from other ministries ('t Hart, 2014). Managing upwards involves providing counsel to- and collaborating with the minister, while continuously negotiating ‘democratic legitimacy for the organization’s output’ (E.-J. van Dorp, 2018, p. 1230). Managing downwards means to build, maintain and develop the ministry’s capacity and resources, including the lower-ranking civil servants (Frederickson & Matkin, 2007). It also includes considering the strategic development of the ministry (in the short- and long term alike) and taking care of the ad hoc work that may arise. Finally, managing outwards implies strategic interaction with stakeholders outside of the ministry (E.-J. van Dorp, 2018). The analysis will be structured according to these points of attention by dividing it into parts containing chapters related to each of these directions.

STRUCTURE FOR THE CHAPTER. In the following, I will delve deeper into these roles and the associated practices of top civil servants. First, I focus on the practices and roles in relation to the politician. I account for the dichotomous relationship between top civil servants and politicians (i.e., full separation of the roles as politician and civil servant), which is followed by an account of the hybrid relationship, where roles and practices are so closely interwoven that one can barely tell the roles apart. Subsequently, the focus will be on the spectrum of relationships between the two extremes, such as Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman's (1981) four images and the various studies asserting a transactional view on the relation. Second, I examine some of the motives and beliefs bureaucrats have been ascribed, focusing on agency theory and stewardship theory. The theories have different assumptions about the bureaucrats' reasoning behind their actions. Third, the chapter turns to the tasks of managing outwards, focusing on the interplay with other ministries, external stakeholders and media. Finally, I will discuss some of the skills and crafts used to navigate between the administrative and the political.

2.1 Practices and roles of civil servants

In the literature, the roles and practices of top civil servants are often described in relation to the role and practices of politicians. First, there is the dichotomous, hierarchical view of the relationship where civil servants are the subordinates of the superior politicians. Second, there is the hybrid relation where it is difficult to differentiate between the tasks, responsibilities and practices of civil servants and politicians. Finally, there is a continuum of role divisions between the two extremes presented above, which also includes the presentation of the transactional relationship: a bargain between bureaucrats and politicians where civil servants have a voice, and politicians must listen to them to some degree. At the end of the day, however, the politician is still making the final decisions.

THE DICHOTOMOUS VIEW. The classic literature on the role division between politicians and bureaucrats begins in the work of Wilson (1887), Goodnow (1900), Gulick ([1936] 2003) and Weber ([1922] 1993). They argue for a clear distinction between the separate spheres of responsibility of the politicians and the bureaucrats. In that sense, the role of the bureaucrat is defined in contrast to the role of the politician.

According to Wilson (1887), the fact that the sphere of administration lies outside the sphere of politics is so obvious that it requires no discussion. Politicians are to set the tasks for bureaucrats, and bureaucrats can only be considered a part of politics 'as machinery is part of the manufactured product'

(1887, p. 210); that is, politics involves expressing the will of the state through policies – this is the task of politicians – whereas the execution of that will is handled by the bureaucracy (Goodnow, 1900). This entails politicians being superior to bureaucrats. However, this dichotomy is a two-way street; that is, the politicians are not to interfere in the work of the bureaucrats: ‘Its motives, its objects, its policy, its standards, must be bureaucratic’ (W. Wilson, 1887, p. 217). Likewise, Goodnow (1900) argues that bureaucrats should be free from the influence of politics when they work (p. 85).

Weber’s position on the subject is in many aspects aligned with the views of Wilson and Goodnow on bureaucrats and politicians. However, Weber devotes more time to the discussion of the different aspects of the dichotomous relationship. First, he argues that continuous administration is required to uphold the ‘organized domination’ that is essential for politicians to possess to remain in power. This requires that the civil service acts obediently towards the politicians who have legitimate power (Weber, [1922] 1993, p. 80). Different qualities are required to fill the politician and civil servant positions. Politicians make policy, which requires three things: passion, responsibility and proportion (Weber, [1922] 1993, pp. 95, 115). In contrast, bureaucrats must implement policy as if it were their own. Thus, bureaucrats ought to be politically neutral; they should not express their own political beliefs let alone work towards them (Weber, [1922] 1993, pp. 95, 115-117).

The Scientific Management School, of which Goodnow is often considered a part, also centred on the hierarchical division of labour between politicians and bureaucrats, even though they primarily focused on the daily management and difficulties that come with management. Nevertheless, Gulick ([1936] 2003) points out that ‘we are faced here by two heterogeneous functions, politics and administration ... the combination of which cannot be undertaken within the structure of the administration without producing inefficiency’ (p. 10).

THE HYBRID RELATION. In contrast to the dichotomous view, the hybrid relation describes a situation in which the roles and practices of civil servants and politicians are quite similar. In this relation, it is difficult to determine who is civil servant and who is politician; both actors will be involved in policymaking, the hierarchy will seem flat, and there is a complete overlap between their tasks. Wille (2013b, p. 163) describes a state she calls ‘adversarial politics’ in which the two groups compete for power with no clear division between tasks and no resolution to the power struggle. She even suggests that there might be an ‘administrative state’ in which the bureaucrats dominate the politicians. However, there is scarce empirical evidence suggesting that this is

happening. Even though Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman (1981) hypothesized that the role of bureaucrats would move towards Image IV, this has not been found empirically; nor has Wille's description of 'adversarial politics' or 'administrative state'.

Many empirical studies focus on the 'neutral bureaucracy'; that is, permanent bureaucrats who do not come and go with the minister (Aberbach & Rockman, 1988; See e.g. Aberbach & Rockman, 2006; Bourgault & Van Dorpe, 2013; Hansen & Salomonsen, 2011; Rhodes, 2011; 't Hart & Wille, 2006). However, many countries have 'temporary bureaucrats' employed in ministerial cabinets (e.g., France, Belgium, Greece), as political civil servants (e.g., Norway, Sweden) or as special advisors (e.g., Denmark, Norway) (Connaughton, 2017, p. 167; de Visscher & Salomonsen, 2013; Kolltveit, 2016). While the share of politically appointed civil servants may vary, the formal politicized civil servants still only make up a small fraction of the civil service (cf. Hustedt & Salomonsen, 2014). However, the temporary bureaucrats are often in a grey zone (or 'purple zone', cf. Alford, Hartley, Yates, & Hughes, 2017) between the role as bureaucrat and role as politician, and few formal rules dictate their assignments and accountability. For instance, some special advisors in Norway have had a mandate to sign international treaties on behalf of Norway (Kolltveit, 2016, p. 485). In these cases, it seems reasonable to consider their role as approaching Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman's fourth image.

In Denmark, ministers can appoint a special advisor,¹ described as 'a temporary public servant appointed to provide partisan advice to a member of the political executive and who is exempt from the political impartiality requirements that apply to the standing bureaucracy' (Shaw & Eichbaum, 2018, p. 3). The special advisor enters into the everyday life of the ministry, thus interacting with the permanent civil service. When investigating the 'ministerial *ménages à trois*', de Visscher and Salomonsen (2013) find the relationships between minister, top civil servants and special advisors to vary in terms of cooperation and division of labour. These difference are ascribed to differences in institutional rules together with the skills of the individual actors.

A CONTINUUM OF RELATIONS. Between the two extremes of the dichotomous view and the hybrid relation, one can consider there to be a continuum of different role divisions between civil servants and politicians. Some tasks are divided between the two groups, while others are handled by both. The implication is that bureaucrats are sometimes involved in policymaking. In the following section, I will elaborate on the bureaucratic practices and roles that revolve around the transactional relationship.

¹ Also known as ministerial advisor, political advisors etc.

Barnard and Simon present some of the first work that features the logic of a transactional relationship. When the work of the Human Relations School developed, it became clear that Barnard ([1938] 1971) and Simon ([1945] 1997) did not agree that bureaucrats would readily obey all of the orders issued by politicians, as is the starting point in the dichotomous view presented above. Rather, they argued that subordinates will obey orders if they consider them to be legitimate and in support of the goal of the organization (Barnard, [1938] 1971, p. 165). The order is then considered to lie within the subordinate's zone of indifference (or zone of acceptance, to use the term later used by Simon ([1945] 1997, p. 185f)). This implies that the subordinate actually has a say (or at least some form of veto) in the decisions made. Even though Barnard's idea of the zone of indifference was originally developed in the context of private organizations, it was soon thereafter applied to the context of bureaucracies and used to discuss the responsiveness of bureaucrats to politicians.

Carpenter and Krause would later adopt a similar standpoint from a different point of departure. Building on principal-agent theory, they would argue that the relationship between principal and agent is less clear-cut dichotomous. They claim that one should be aware of decision-making not being one-way communication, as principal-agent theory originally suggested. Instead, Carpenter and Krause (2015) refer to the relationship as a transactional relationship, where repeated interactions call for cooperation and a norm of reciprocity (2015, p. 14). This gives the agent (in this case the bureaucrat), a voice in the interaction, because the principal (the politician), will require help to solve other tasks in the future. Hence, one could argue that while the bureaucrat is still considered subordinate to the politician, the reciprocal authority gives the bureaucrat a voice in the commerce.

Even though Barnard, Simon, Carpenter and Krause all highlight the relevance of the reciprocal relationships, their work remains on a general level. They do not discuss other aspects of the role division, involvement in policy-making and so forth. Other researchers have taken up this task and discussed role division. Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman (1981) were among the first to elaborate on how the roles of civil servants might overlap with politicians when they suggested seeing the relationship as a continuum ranging from complete role segregation to total fusion of roles. They call this role distribution for 'images', and for each image, the bureaucrat, understood in Weberian terms in Image I, comes one step closer to behaving as the politician. Image I, 'Policy/Administration', has a clear-cut role division: Politicians make policy and bureaucrats administer it (Aberbach et al., 1981, p. 4). In other words, it is for the politicians to make decisions and for the bureaucrats to implement

those decisions loyally. Image II, 'Facts/Interests', is where politicians and bureaucrats participate in the policymaking, but their contributions differ. Bureaucrats contribute with neutral, technical expertise in the form of facts and knowledge, whereas politicians are concerned with their responsiveness to the electorate and therefore contribute with values, interests and knowhow regarding the current political landscape (Aberbach et al., 1981, p. 6). In Image III, 'Energy/Equilibrium', the civil servant is not only involved in policymaking but also concerned with politics (Aberbach et al., 1981, p. 9). Politicians are expected to express extensive and diffused political standpoints whereupon bureaucrats will mediate the narrower interests of organized clienteles. Lastly, Image IV, 'The pure hybrid', has no separate tasks for politicians. Civil servants are not only implementing policy, formulating policy and brokering interests; they are also articulating ideals. This is 'the bureaucratization of politics and politicization of bureaucracy' (Aberbach et al., 1981, p. 19). When studying that relationship in France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, the UK and the USA, they found that top civil servants are increasingly engaging in politics; that is, giving advice on political matters, including policy formulation. However, they found it difficult to determine who is the more influential of civil servants and politicians (Aberbach et al., 1981). Newer studies lend continuing support to Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman's original conclusions regarding the involvement of bureaucrats in policymaking, and similar results have been found in Denmark (J. G. Christensen, 2004), Germany (Derlien, 2003), the Netherlands ('t Hart & Wille, 2006) and the UK (Rhodes, 2011).

The notion of transactional authority has been prevalent in studies of top bureaucrats based on Public Service Bargains. Hood and Lodge's (2006) reintroduction of Schaffer's (1973, p. 252) theory on Public Service Bargains sparked a new line of study of the roles of top bureaucrats in the early 2000s. Public Service Bargains (henceforth PSB) can be defined as 'any explicit or implicit understanding between (senior) public servants and other actors in a political system over their duties and entitlements relating to responsibility, autonomy and political identity, and expressed in convention or formal law or a mixture of both' (Hood, 2000, p. 8). Usually, the bargain is determined based on three parameters: reward, competency and loyalty. The term 'bargain' suggests that the distribution of reward, competency and loyalty is based on some form of negotiation between politicians and bureaucrats; that is, the politicians are not alone in pulling the strings. Even though there can be an almost infinite number of different bargains, three bargains are prevalent in the literature: the Schafferian bargain, the managerial bargain, and the hybrid bargain (Hood, 2000, 2001, 2002; Salomonsen & Knudsen, 2011). Aside from the starting point being reciprocal authority, the Schafferian bargain largely resembles the Weberian ideal: The bureaucrat provides loyalty and technical

expertise to the politician in return for trust, anonymity, meritocratic hiring and permanent employment. In this bargain, the bureaucrat must act politically neutral, and the politician is always accountable and responsible (Hood, 2000, 2001, 2002; Salomonsen & Knudsen, 2011). In the managerial bargain, the bureaucrat has much more autonomy and receives a higher wage together with other perquisites. However, the bureaucrat is also held accountable for mistakes and may function as a lightning rod for the politician (Hood, 2000). Finally, the hybrid bargain is a mix of the other bargains; politicians and bureaucrats share the accountability, and even though the bureaucrat enjoys greater autonomy than in the Schafferian bargain, they still have less autonomy than in the managerial bargain. In contrast to the Schafferian bargain, the bureaucrat may have a partisan identity. Should that be the case, however, they are expected to leave office when there is a change of government (Hood, 2000). PSB has been used to investigate the relationship between politicians and top bureaucrats on the domestic level (See Elston, 2017; Hansen & Salomonsen, 2011; Salomonsen & Knudsen, 2011) as well as in cross-national analysis (see Bourgault & Van Dorpe, 2013; de Visscher & Salomonsen, 2013; Hansen, Steen, & Jong, 2013).

Some results regarding PSBs are quite ambiguous, and the three distinct bargain types are rarely found in their pure form. Instead, researchers often identify a combination of traits from different kinds of bargains – with the managerial bargain mentioned especially frequently (Bourgault, 2011; Bourgault & Van Dorpe, 2013; Hansen & Salomonsen, 2011; Steen & Van der Meer, 2011). Concurrently, some results reveal discrepancies between the explicit agreements and the tacit agreements between politicians and top bureaucrats (Elston, 2017). In Belgium, there seems to be incongruence between the explicit bargains (i.e., the bargains described on paper) and the tacit bargains (the bargains found when asking the bureaucrats in surveys and interviews). Some studies even found conflicting results when comparing data from questionnaires with data from interviews, which can be argued to indicate a ‘disconnection between aspirations and practice’ (Steen & Van der Meer, 2011, p. 229). According to Elston (2017, p. 4) this illustrates ‘that stated and practiced PSB can be inconsistent’. It is thus important to supplement the interviews and surveys with material on the practiced PSBs.

One way to do so is observational studies, such as Rhodes’ (2011) study of British permanent secretaries and ministers conducted in the mid-00s, which used an ethnographic approach to study permanent secretaries. Rhodes delivers a compelling narrative of a day in a permanent secretary’s life based on his observations (2011, pp. 110-117). The reader gets a behind-the-scenes look at the hectic and changeable life as a permanent secretary. Rhodes investigates four main themes across the British government: coping, beliefs and practices,

storytelling and responsiveness. He focuses on how the Westminster narrative (i.e., the notion that bureaucrats are to follow orders while politicians are to give out orders) is alive and kicking among bureaucrats, outdated though it may seem to outsiders.

Based on diary studies, Rhodes illustrates how permanent secretaries in the UK spend more time on external relations and management than on politics and policy. Rhodes (2011, p. 109) finds that permanent secretaries on average spend only 12.5 per cent of their time on politics and policy. However, recent diary studies of top civil servants on the municipal level find that they spend a significant amount of time oriented upwards to the political system, because the political system is 'greedy' and continuously wants involvement and counsel from the civil service (E.-J. van Dorp, 2018).

The importance of being oriented upwards has also been pointed out by Noordegraaf (2000, 2007), who used observations to study top civil servants in the Netherlands. Noordegraaf argues that the working lives of top civil servants are very hectic, caught between issue streams and political considerations. This forces them to allocate their attention amidst different ambiguities, which requires interpretive competencies (the ability to navigate cues, stimuli and triggers), institutional competencies (similar to Weber's *dienstwissen*) and textual competencies (similar to Mangset & Asdal's notion on note writing (2019)). Further along these lines, Noordegraaf argues that the top civil servants play a political role, because they get to interpret and present information to politicians.

This potentially political role is in line with the notion of functional politicization, which refers to a strengthening political responsiveness by 'anticipating and integrating politically relevant aspects in the bureaucracy's day-to-day functions', including the provision of political-tactical advice (Hustedt & Salomonsen, 2014, p. 750). This includes drafting providing strategic advice on policy initiatives to the minister (Dahlström & Niklasson, 2013, p. 905), including anticipating reactions by politicians when drafting/crafting policy and considering whether it is politically feasible (Mayntz & Derlien, 1989, pp. 393, 402). If it is not politically feasible, then the bureaucrats can adjust their advice to accommodate this before the minister has called for it. It is important to emphasize that this is not necessarily considered problematic as long as the civil servants can still provide free, frank and fearless counsel (Hustedt & Salomonsen, 2014).

Hence, the literature on civil servants presents various relations between top civil servants and politicians, where the former play a political role to varying degrees. In a dichotomous view, this would be reserved for politicians. It is not necessarily problematic, however, as long as the top civil servants have

the freedom to act in accordance with what is expected of civil servants (e.g., provide free, frank and fearless advice).

2.2 Assumptions about behaviour

The following section presents some of the assumptions about the civil servants' behaviour. First, it presents the fear of civil servants as an offensive class that will exploit their superior knowledge. This will be followed by a presentation of the agency perspective, which considers the civil servant an 'economic man' who is rational and therefore striving to maximize their own utility. This can be problematic, because the theory assumes that the principal (in my case: the minister) and the agent (the top civil servant) have divergent interests. The agency perspective is challenged by stewardship theory, where the assumptions about the steward are that they work towards the collective good. Furthermore, the interest of principal and steward are assumed to be relatively close from the outset of the collaboration.

BUREAUCRATS AS AN OFFENSIVE CLASS. Weber ([1922] 1993) argued that bureaucracy was superior to any other form of organization: 'Precision, speed, unambiguity, knowledge of the files, continuity, discretion, unity, strict subordination, reduction of friction and of material and personal costs – these are raised to the optimum point in the strictly bureaucratic administration' (p. 214). This implies confidence in the loyalty of bureaucrats on a general level. Nevertheless, Weber also worried about the bureaucrats' accumulation of knowledge and comparative seniority. He expressed a fear that bureaucrats would exploit their technical knowledge to influence politicians. The following quote illustrates Weber's ([1922] 1993) fear concisely: 'Under normal conditions, the power position of a fully developed bureaucracy is always overpowering. The "political master" finds himself in the position of the "dilettante" who stands opposite the "expert"' (p. 232). In continuation of this, Weber articulates his concern that bureaucrats have secret, personal agendas they might try to implement. Wilson and Goodnow both share this apprehension. Wilson is concerned that the bureaucracy will develop into an 'offensive class' separated from politicians and, consequently, from the legitimacy of democracy (W. Wilson, 1887). Following this, Gulick ([1936] 2003) argues for the interest of bureaucrats to act autonomously due to 'omniscience and a great desire for complete independence' (p. 11).

Researchers from the Human Relations School also expressed this fear. One of the most well-known debates took place between Friedrich (1940) and Finer (1941). Although they agree on the problem, namely that bureaucrats'

technical knowledge challenges the politicians' control, they have very different approaches to overcoming it. Friedrich (1940) argues that it will be sufficient to trust the bureaucrats' professional norms and ethical standards to secure that they will not exploit their technical knowledge to advance their policy preferences; that is, the inner checks of bureaucrats will be sufficient control. Finer (1941) disagrees, arguing that strict, external control mechanisms should be implemented to contain the bureaucrats: 'Moral responsibility is likely to operate in direct proportion to the strictness and efficiency of political responsibility, and to fall away into all sorts of perversions when the latter is weakly enforced' (p. 350).

In short, they assume bureaucrats act to gain power. The motives presented in the literature are multiple: to gain independence (Gulick, [1936] 2003), to work towards a personal goal (Weber, [1922] 1993), to gain more prestige, money and power (Downs, 1967, pp. 83-88), or to increase utility to reshape the bureau or to increase slack (Dunleavy, 1991; Niskanen, 1971).

AGENCY THEORY. Mitnick (1975) and Moe (1984) introduced agency theory to political science. Many elements of the theory are recognizable from previous literature on bureaucrats, despite the roots of the theory in economics. Principal-agent theory can be applied when analysing different relationships within the ministerial hierarchy, including the relationship between minister and permanent secretary. The basic idea is that a principal (e.g., the minister) lacks the time or skill to perform a given task and therefore hires an agent (the permanent secretary) to perform the task (Moe, 1984). This entails that the agent can impact the principal's payoff. However, the principal and agent are assumed to have different interests, among other things because actions that benefit the principal might be costly to the agent. Concurrently, the agent is assumed to be rational and self-serving concurrently with having more information than the principal (information asymmetry), because the principal can observe the outcome but not the output of the agent's actions. Moreover, the agent is more prone to taking risks than is the principal (risk aversion). This leads to the problem of adverse selection (*ex ante*) and the risk of moral hazard (*ex post*). The principal can take different measures to ensure that the agent acts in accordance with the principal's interests. *Ex ante*, the selection of the agent and the contract is in focus. First, the principal can use the ally principle and try to find an agent whose interest converges with the principal's interest (Miller, 2005). Second, the principal can design the contract with incentives for the bureaucrat to act in accordance with the interest of the principal. *Ex post*, different types of monitoring (see McCubbins & Schwartz, 1984) and sanctioning can be used to ensure compliance with the principal's interest

(Miller, 2005). Hence, agency theory has been used to study delegation, accountability and other aspects of the bureaucratic–politico relationship empirically, in, for example, the U.S. Congress (Kiewiet & McCubbins, 1991) and many European countries, such as Austria, Denmark, Germany and the UK (Strøm, Müller, & Bergman, 2003).

STEWARDSHIP THEORY. Stewardship theory was developed as an alternative to agency theory, the most distinctive argument being the need to develop a theory that challenges the assumptions of a rational, ‘economic’ agent, another argument being that focusing exclusively on agency theory can entail overlooking complexity in the organizations (Davis, Schoorman, & Donaldson, 1997b, pp. 20–21).

Overall, the theory assumes that the stewards strive to be a good steward to the principal. This includes the notion that stewards strive to make decisions that they find to be in the best interest of the principal concurrently with the assumption that there is a strong relationship between the principal’s satisfaction and organizational success (Davis et al., 1997b). Schillemans’ (2012, p. 6) parameters (motivation, goal focus, interests, power distance and exercised power, and management style) serve as the starting point for this account.

First, stewards are assumed to be intrinsically motivated; that is, motivated by ‘ego-related’ values such as job satisfaction, achievement, self-actualization and peer recognition; and by ‘content-related’ values, such as serving the public good (Davis et al., 1997b; Donaldson & Davis, 1991; Schillemans, 2012; Van Slyke, 2006).

Second, stewards are not primarily motivated by self-interest but by collective or social goals (Schillemans, 2012). This does not entail pro-social motivation as the only type of motivation, and as Dicke (2002) states, ‘Even highly altruistic, public service minded individuals will not be attracted or retained by organizations offering hard work at insufficient wages’ (p. 465).

Third, according to stewardship theory, one can think of interests as being ordered on a scale where the steward’s interests will presumably approach or overlap with the principal’s interest (Schillemans, 2012, p. 5). This is considered a contrast to agency theory, where the assumption is arguably conflicting interests between principal and agent. However, agency theory researchers have also argued the degree of conflict to be ordered on a continuum (e.g. Waterman & Meier, 1998), which has led to questions about whether this assumption really differs (e.g. Robert, Dacin, & Ira, 1997). The counterarguments forwarded by stewardship theorists are that if there is no conflict of interest between principal and agent, there will be no agency loss and therefore no need for mechanisms designed to curb agency loss (Davis, Schoorman, &

Donaldson, 1997a). While the degree of conflict of interest might vary in both agency theory and stewardship theory, the difference is that in the former assumes interests to differ substantially in contrast to the latter, where the starting point is that the interests are inclined to coincide.

The fourth and fifth assumptions cover the power distance and exertion of power. There is a distinct hierarchical relationship in agency theory, which the strong institution holds in check. This means that the actors' power is rooted in their positions in the hierarchy. In contrast, stewardship theory emphasizes the importance of maintaining a relatively low power distance between principal and steward combined with a personal use of power. This combination nurtures interpersonal relations that minimize the principal–steward distance, fostering respect and loyalty (Davis et al., 1997b, p. 31; Schillemans, 2012, p. 5). Consequently, establishing interpersonal relations and building the required trust can be time-consuming and costly.

Finally, the management style differs as a consequence of the above. Agency theory calls for an external management style where the agents are controlled (e.g., through monitoring) to prevent the agent from working towards self-serving goals. Stewardship theory posits limited self-regulation, where the steward should be given discretion and autonomy within some boundaries agreed upon by the principal and steward (Schillemans, 2012, p. 5; Van Slyke, 2006, p. 167)

Stewardship theory stems from organization and management research (Donaldson & Davis, 1991). The public administration literature has applied the theory to the study of the relation between governmental departments and agencies (e.g. Schillemans, 2012) and to the relationships between frontline workers and their managers (e.g. Dicke, 2002; Dicke & Ott, 2002).

2.3 Interaction with other actors

Civil servants have to work not only with elected politicians but also with a range of other actors, including other government organizations (in this case other ministries), the media and external stakeholders, such as interest organizations (Hartley 2020). This part will also concern one of the actors within the ministry: the special advisor.

OTHER MINISTRIES. Top civil servants are navigating both their own ministry and collaborating with civil servants in other ministries. This is, among other things, due to a 'mismatch or de-connection between jurisdictions on one hand and social, technological, political, and economic problems on the other hand' (Frederickson & Matkin, 2007). For instance, finding solutions to the climate crisis is not a problem that only concerns the climate ministry; it

also relates to the ministries concerned with housing, the economy, research etc. Thus, the ministries cannot work as separate entities but need to collaborate with the other ministries. Top civil servants have an important task in finding solutions and building common ground when collaborating with other ministries (Denhardt, 1999). Additionally, the rise of constantly more complex challenges might also call for other competencies than previously (Lodge & Wegrich, 2012). This collaboration is especially important in Denmark because the ministers have distinct accountability for their own ministerial remit, in contrast to Sweden, for instance, where the ministers share a collective responsibility.

MEDIATIZATION. The media are important for top civil servants, because the presence of the media is a structural condition of the everyday lives of top executives in the ministries (Grube, 2019; Hjarvard, 2013; Salomonsen, Frandsen, & Johansen, 2016). Mediatization regards how a system, in my case the central administration in general and the separate ministries in particular, is influenced by and adjusts to the logics of the media (Hjarvard, 2013). A high level of media exposure might affect the political-administrative relation in a manner that creates distance between civil servants and politicians due to ‘media scrutiny and more rapid communication cycles, and the increasing risk of malicious critique’ (Bach & Wegrich, 2020, p. 540). In this dissertation, the interesting point of intersection is how the media logic influences and impacts the everyday lives of the top civil servants.

In a recent study of the Westminster system in New Zealand, Canada, the UK and Australia, Grube (2019) investigates how top bureaucrats react to media. First, some top civil servants are willing to defend themselves, for instance by contradicting, and thus calling out, elected politicians if they misuse information. This is a way of defending the reputation of the civil service and/or the ministry. Second, Grube finds a development towards top civil servants pursuing the so-called ‘public value’ agenda (cf. Moore, 2013), which entails top civil servants to ‘conceive of a wider independent responsibility’ (Grube, 2019, p. 190) by articulating long-term problems and general challenges within their remit. Third, Grube points to the declined anonymity of top civil servants caused by, among other things, top civil servants’ appearances and questioning in oversight committees, the intrusive media, the rise of social media and combative politicians.

In continuation of these findings, Grube (2019) develops a spectrum of public behaviour that can be applied to top bureaucrats ranging from complete silence to speaking one’s mind on everything and anything. While the concepts have been developed in a Westminster context, there is no reason to believe the scale cannot be transferred to other types of systems. Grube argues

that the individual actor (e.g., permanent secretaries) will have to assess how to engage, ranging from complete silence to ‘jumping off the deep end’ and proclaiming their opinions far and wide. Between these are a range of steps: the low profile (factually answering questions to the media off the record), publicly reactive (issuing factual media releases or participating in interviews in agreement with the minister), publicly proactive (making public statements on important but not politically contentious issues without being asked to do so), and high voltage intervention (publicly commenting on salient issues despite knowing that doing so entails controversy) (Grube, 2019, p. 196).

STAKEHOLDERS. Top civil servants must also focus on the ‘inside-out’ relations (Denhardt, 1999) and engaging in dialogue with stakeholders to learn more about what is considered valuable and possible, to obtain resources (e.g., information), and to learn about operational challenges (Moore, 2013, p. 7). Van der Wal (2017, 2020) distinguishes between five different types of stakeholder allegiance: advocates, followers, indifferent, blockers and adversaries. Top civil servants must continuously engage with the stakeholders in order to work on their allegiance, for instance by including them in different stages of policy formulation (e.g. Mayntz & Scharpf, 1975) or by deciding who is to be included in the process of translating broad policy initiatives into practical guidelines ('t Hart, 2014, p. 29). Van der Wal (2020, p. 760) also presents different ways of managing the various stakeholder allegiances: *advocates* should continuously be actively engaged and their inputs should be used directly, *followers*’ support should not be taken for granted, so increasing their understanding of the benefits of policy is important, *indifferents* should be kept informed, and attempt should be made to try to convince *blockers* of the mutual interest and to try to overcome their scepticism with information, and finally, in regard to the *adversaries*, counter arguments should be developed concurrently with the establishment of a deeper understanding of their values and interests. If needed, the top civil servants can play a role in trying to move the stakeholders from an indifferent position to becoming a follower or even an advocate of different policy initiatives before they are put forward.

2.4 Skills and crafts

As argued earlier, top civil servants must orient themselves upwards (towards the politician), downwards (toward the other civil servants) and outwards (towards stakeholders, other ministries etc.) (cf. 't Hart, 2014; E.-J. van Dorp, 2018). In the following, I will discuss three types of skills/crafts essential to navigating and handling the various tasks of top civil servants: *fachwissen*, *dienstwissen* and political craft.

FACHWISSEN AND DIENSTWISSEN. Weber differs between *fachwissen* (i.e., technical knowledge) and *dienstwissen* (procedural knowledge). *Fachwissen* can be used to describe the disciplinary knowledge one gains through education, whether you are trained as a generalist (e.g., having a degree in political science, economy or law) or as a specialist (e.g., as a doctor, geologist or forestry and landscape engineer) (cf. the distinction made by Smith-Udvalget, 2015, p. 118).

In contrast, *dienstwissen* is knowledge gained through practice or ‘growing out of experience in the service’ (Weber, 1968 [1921], p. 225). Concurrent with the distinction made in the Bo Smith-report (Smith-Udvalget, 2015, pp. 116-118), I distinguish between two types of *dienstwissen*. First, there is the general procedural knowledge, which can be defined as the knowledge about formal and informal norms and procedures within the administrative and political system. For instance, knowledge about the legislative process, the forums for coordination within government, and the procedures for processing written notes within the ministerial hierarchy (cf. the analysis by Mangset & Asdal, 2019). This type of knowledge can be argued to be easily transferable within the ministerial system. Second, there is the remit-specific procedural knowledge, which refers to the knowledge about policy content, the knowledge that serves as the basis for policy formulation, and the knowledge about previous initiatives that were not enacted within the ministerial remit. This second type of *dienstwissen* is not useful to the same extent across ministerial remits. Newer research has also pointed to the importance of *dienstwissen*; for instance, in an article on public leadership as gardening, Frederickson and Matkin (2007) describe the importance of ‘knowing your seasons’, such as legislative cycles and organization routines.

POLITICAL CRAFT. Political craft, also known as *political nous* (cf. Rhodes, 2016b) or *political astuteness* (cf. Hartley, Alford, Hughes, & Yates, 2015), refers to:

the ability to assess the likely political implications and ramifications of policy proposals; to consider a specific issue within the broader context of the government's programme; to anticipate and, where necessary, influence or even manipulate the reactions of other actors in the policymaking process, notably other ministries, parliament, subnational governments and organized interests; and to design processes that maximize the chances for the realization of ministers' substantive objectives (Goetz, 1997, p. 754).

It is important to emphasize that political craft does not refer to party-political matters, but rather to the broader understanding and view of politics, understood as civil service, the core executives, parliament, government and the media (Rhodes, 2016b, p. 644). This includes the formal and informal interaction between people as well as between institutions. This craft is essential during functional politicization, where top civil servants ‘need to understand and make proposals which recognize diverse interests and reflect a political environment, but are not “party political”’ (Hartley & Manzie, 2020, p. 577). Like *dienstwissen*, political craft is acquired on the job and through experience, where the civil servants need to pick up the craft and to train their ‘political antennae’ (Rhodes, 2011, p. 121).

The way to train the political antennae and acquire political craft illustrates how this term is difficult to grasp, to articulate and to observe. However, Hartley, Alford, Hughes and Yates (2013) break political craft down into five skills, which they argue to be essential to political craft (*political astuteness*): personal skills, interpersonal skills, reading people and situations, building alignment and alliances, and strategic direction and scanning. *Personal skills* are the ability to be open to other perspectives, to listen to and reflect upon these perspectives, on top of being proactive. *Interpersonal skills* are divided into soft skills, which include the ability to influence others, and tough skills, which include the ability to negotiate, withstand pressure and handle conflicts. *Reading people and situations* refers to the ability to analyse dynamics, understanding power relations and conflict, and detecting underlying agendas. *Building alignment and alliances* is about having *fingerspitzengefühl* with respect to context, actors and agendas when working towards an objective. It includes the ability to seek out alliances and to find joint solutions. Finally, *strategic direction and scanning* is about long-term thinking, including strategic considerations about the purpose of the organization and acting in accordance with it. For a profound exposition of the criteria, see (Hartley et al., 2013; Hartley & Manzie, 2020). Note that these skills must be exerted across the three levels: upwards, downwards and outwards.

Chapter 3.

Methodological framework

The overall aim of this dissertation is to advance our understanding of the role that top civil servants play in the democratic process. I argue that two aspects need to be examined in order to answer this overall question. First, we must know what top civil servants actually do, that is, what kind of activities they engage in during their workday, how they interact with other actors, how they prioritize their time – that is, their practices. However, if we want to advance our understanding of the role top civil servants play, it is also important to understand why they do as they do. In other words, we need to examine how top civil servants see their role in order to grasp why the practices they engage in are meaningful to them.

To answer these questions, I have chosen to conduct an ethnographic study combining observational methods (shadowing) with interviews. This allows me to see the rituals, routines, and norms in the encounters between permanent secretaries and other actors – things that might be such a large part of their everyday life that they can be difficult to explain. This also allows me to show excerpts where they are ‘in action’ and to hear the stories, including illustrating recurrent dilemmas. In addition, these methods allow me to explore aspects of their everyday life I did not know to be important beforehand, just like the back-and-forth between empirical material and theory continually deepens my understanding of the question, the material, and the relation to the existing literature.

In the following, I will lay out the methodological framework of my thesis and discuss some of the methodological considerations I have encountered during the process. I begin by laying out the methodology behind the study. I account for the abductive logic of inquiry that I follow. I put forward the research criteria that will be the baseline in this thesis and introduce the research design and cases. Afterwards, I describe the data generation process, i.e. shadowing and interviewing, including reflections on writing field notes, my own positionality in the field, and construction of topic guides. Finally, the process of transcription and the initial analysis of the material are put forward.

3.1 Methodology and logic of inquiry

The goal of this PhD dissertation is twofold. First, it investigates the practices of permanent secretaries. Using observations, the aim is to outline their everyday life, including what they do, how they prioritize their time, and which

actors they interact with. The second part of the dissertation focuses on how the roles of permanent secretaries are negotiated through social interaction and how meaning is ascribed to the different roles, i.e. the intersubjective understanding of the role. The first object of study (what permanent secretaries actually do) can be considered and studied as an objective reality; the second (and most substantial) part of the dissertation focuses on a socially constructed phenomenon, namely the permanent secretaries' practices and roles, which are continuously revised and changed through social interactions. I am concerned with how permanent secretaries perceive and ascribe meaning to their roles and practices, as well as how their immediate colleagues perceive them. Thus, the object of study is a socially constructed phenomenon, which can only be accessed/studied through interpretation. This is not to say that one cannot gain knowledge about 'the characteristics of permanent secretaries', such as their career paths, biographical information etc. However, my thesis focuses on studying interactions in the practices and the roles permanent secretaries are expected to take on.

I brought with me to the field theoretical insights from various literatures on the relationship between politicians and civil servants presented in the theory chapter. However, since the dissertation is exploratory, I did not have a clear hypothesis about the role top civil servants play in the democratic process and therefore adopted an abductive logic of inquiry. Both the inductive logic of inquiry, i.e. going from the specific to the general, and the deductive logic, i.e. going from the general to the specific, follow a linear logic prescribing the researcher to follow a predetermined line of steps. In contrast, the abductive approach is an iterative process, where the researcher goes back and forth between empirical observations and theory (Blaikie, 2010, p. 156; Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 32; Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). Abductive logic arguably follows a spiral pattern where the researcher's understanding is deepened and enriched by an ongoing interplay between empirical observations and theory. This recursive approach is the main characteristic of the abductive line of inquiry (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, pp. 28-32).

As Chapter 2 illustrated, there is an extensive literature on civil servants, but a more limited literature on top civil servants. In addition, only few studies have applied ethnographic methods in the study of top civil servants. Building on other studies of elites (e.g. Kreiss, Lawrence, & McGregor, 2018), the abductive logic of inquiry allows me to draw on the literature on (top) civil servants while being open to new findings in data. This allows me to take full advantage of my data and thereby increase the contribution to the literature.

3.2 Research criteria in interpretive studies

Since my dissertation covers both phenomena that could be considered “real” (what permanent secretaries do) and phenomena that could be considered “socially constructed” (their understanding and negotiation of the role), I have chosen to rely on Maxwell’s critical realist criteria for judging the quality of qualitative research. According to Maxwell, there are three types of validity which are important: descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical (Maxwell, 2012). Descriptive validity regards factual accuracy, i.e. the craftsmanship of the data. This concerns whether an account is descriptively accurate, i.e. does the researcher leave out, distort, or make up people, actions, or dialogue when describing a situation; is the dialogue noted down or transcribed correctly, etc. Within the category of descriptive validity, one can distinguish between primary and secondary descriptive validity. Primary descriptive validity regards the accounts directly observed by the researcher, i.e. something the researcher has seen or heard, while secondary descriptive validity regards accounts of things that happened while the researcher was not present (Maxwell, 1992, pp. 285-288; 2012, pp. 134-137). For instance, when I see a case file and I am told that it was signed by the head of department, I have not observed this happen, but potentially, I could have been present when it happened. Hence, because it concerns ‘behavioural events’ that in principle are observable, the before-mentioned issue concerns the secondary descriptive validity. The secondary descriptive account has been used to gain knowledge about meetings where I was not allowed to be present, e.g. meetings in government committees, or about things I would not be able to observe due to the timing of the data collection, e.g. differences across governments.

Furthermore, descriptive validity refers to the issue of inclusion and omission. However, “no account can include everything, and ‘accuracy is a criterion relative the purpose for which it is sought’ (Runciman, 1983, p.97;)” (Maxwell, 1992, p. 287). For instance, it would threaten the descriptive validity of the account if I leave out things the permanent secretaries believe to be significant for the account.

Interpretive validity regards the researcher’s interpretation of data, i.e. what the behavior and events actually mean to people (Maxwell, 1992, pp. 288-291; 2012, pp. 137-139). This cannot be directly observed and must therefore be inferred and interpreted based on the observed practices of and interviews with the participants, in this case the permanent secretaries. It is therefore important to be aware of how accounts of the permanent secretaries’ meaning will always be constructed by the researcher based on the participant’s account and the other evidence present. It is important to stress that

the researcher's account of the participant's meaning cannot rely solely on accounts delivered by the participant due to three things. First, participants might recall their feelings in a situation inaccurately, just as we know participants cannot necessarily recall other previous experiences accurately. Second, they might be unaware of their feelings, and third, participants may conceal or distort their feelings consciously or unconsciously (Maxwell, 1992, p. 290).

Finally, the theoretical validity in regards to the theoretical constructions that are developed or brought to the study by the researcher (Maxwell, 1992, pp. 291-293; 2012, pp. 139-141). Theoretical validity is defined as "an account's validity as a *theory* of some phenomenon" (Maxwell, 1992, p. 291). According to Maxwell, theories have two components, each with corresponding theoretical validity. The first component is categories or concepts. The theoretical validity here refers to the application of categories or concepts to an empirical phenomenon. The second component regards the alleged relationship between these concepts. In this case, theoretical validity regards the claimed relationship between the categories or concepts.

For instance, I might label the advice provided to the minister by the permanent secretary as politicized. The identification of the piece of advice as "politicized" is an application of a theoretical construct that I add to the descriptive and interpretive understanding of the practice. Connecting this to other aspects of being a permanent secretary, to the quantity of special advisors, or to working in the top of a ministry is a postulation of the theoretical relationships between these 'constructs'.

In addition to the three types of validity, Maxwell discusses generalizability, i.e. the degree to which one can extend the account from a particular setting or population to other settings, people, or times (Maxwell, 1992, pp. 293-295; 2012, pp. 141-143). There are two types of generalizability: internal generalizability (within a setting, e.g. to permanent secretaries in ministries I have not studied) and external generalizability (to other settings, e.g. to permanent secretaries in other countries, working under similar conditions). Initially, the aspiration of this study is internal generalization. However, there are further lessons to be learned from the study. The knowledge about the connection between the political and the administrative can probably be used across different levels of government and across countries.

Before continuing with the research design and case selection, I want to underline that these research criteria can be argued to serve a slightly different purpose than research criteria in most quantitative and experimental research. In a qualitative study, it is difficult to eliminate threats to validity through design features, e.g. randomization and controls (Maxwell, 1992, p. 296), because there are few cases. The focus is to understand the particular

instead of generalizing to the external. The research criteria are used as a guiding tool during the data collection and data analysis.

3.3 Sampling

Analyzing how top civil servants' role unfolds and influences the bureaucratic and democratic process is challenging. It requires knowledge about many different aspects of top civil servants' everyday life in a setting with a clear division between elected officials and civil servants. To meet the challenges, I chose to study permanent secretaries in Denmark. The empirical material was collected through shadowing of permanent secretaries and interviews with permanent secretaries, ministers, and heads of division.

I study permanent secretaries in the Danish central administration. The choice of Denmark as the setting is in many ways based on practical concerns. First, I believe it is an advantage to conduct a study in a country where I speak the language fluently because it will enhance the descriptive validity of the study. Second, it seemed more likely that I would be allowed to shadow in Denmark than in other countries, as mutual acquaintances could put me in contact with permanent secretaries or vouch for me etc. These are relatively common considerations in interpretive studies, where gaining access and choosing settings and cases are often two sides of the same coin (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, pp. 57-60).

SAMPLING. This dissertation is based on shadowing and interviews conducted in Danish ministries from 2018-2020. The criteria for choosing permanent secretaries to shadow has been quite pragmatic: where am I most likely to be allowed to do shadowing. These pragmatic considerations are often part of ethnographic research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019, pp. 31-33), and as I mentioned earlier, getting access and choosing cases are closely connected in interpretive research. Before conducting the first 'real' data collection, I conducted two pre-studies. I spent a total of eight days in the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Integration and Immigration in 2018. This allowed me to become familiar with the field, gain experience taking field notes, establish contacts within the central administration, and thereby, hopefully, gain trust. In 2019, I began the data collection, and table 3.1 gives an overview of the shadowing while table 3.2 gives an overview of the interviews.

Table 3.1: Overview of fieldwork

Ministry	Observed fieldwork in:	
	Days	Year
Ministry of Education	4	2018
Ministry of Integration and Immigration	4	2018
Ministry of Education	5	2019
Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior	5	2019
Ministry of Climate, Energy and Utilities	5	2019
The Foreign Ministry	2	2020
Ministry of Employment	4	2020
Ministry of Integration and Immigration	5	2020
Ministry of Justice	3	2020
Ministry of Taxation	5	2020
In total	34 (42)	

Note: During 2018, I did 8 days of pre-studies split evenly between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Integration of Immigration. Both ministries got new permanent secretaries in immediate continuation of my observations. The remaining fieldwork is based on the pre-studies.

I requested observations in 15 ministries. Six permanent secretaries initially denied my request of whom one revealed the person had gotten a new position, which was not publicly announced yet. One permanent secretary changed their mind after I met them at a meeting in the Prime Minister's Office and agreed to be shadowed. Three of the four remaining permanent secretaries were asked if they would participate when I only had arrangements in two ministries (besides the two pre-studies). I do not know to what degree that influenced their decision. Everyone except one agreed to participate in an interview instead of observations.

Ten permanent secretaries initially agreed to be shadowed of whom one got a new position before the shadowing was scheduled, and in another ministry the shadowing was rescheduled several times during corona before it had to be cancelled due to corona restrictions. I ended up shadowing eight permanent secretaries, ten if you include the pre-studies.²

Three ministries³ were not asked to participate in shadowing due the complicated nature of shadowing during a pandemic. Table 3.2 shows an overview of the 42 recorded interviews I conducted, which provided me with a little

² There are no excerpts from the pre-studies; they were used to deepen my understanding before the further collection of data.

³ Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Transport, and Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs.

more than 30 hours of interview material. I usually asked the permanent secretary for 1 hour, while ministers and head of divisions were asked for 30 minutes. The shortest interview ended up being ~15 minutes, the longest 1 hour and 45 minutes. On top of the interviews in the table, I had informal talks and interviews, usually in relation to the fieldwork, with a broader range of civil servants.

If the interviewees asked for it, they got their quotes back for approval. This usually only resulted in minor changes, except for one interview where several quotes were changed. However, the points were still similar to the first version. It was a similar procedure for the excerpts, where some ministries asked to get the excerpts for inspection. In general, my stays in the ministries were subject to confidentiality, similar to the employees in the ministry. Hence, details about the content of cases, upcoming initiatives, information about individuals etc. could not be included in this dissertation. I made an agreement with the permanent secretaries that I was interested in tasks, procedures, and roles but not specific content. Some ministries had PET⁴ (The Danish Security and Intelligence Service) collect information about me before I gained access. In some ministries, I also signed contract stating that the ministry would not exert manuscript control, but would be given an opportunity to review material concerning their ministry and remove material that violated the confidentiality agreement. This resulted in minor linguistic changes in some excerpts, but I have not been asked to omit any excerpts from the fieldwork.

Table 3.2: Overview of interviews

Ministry	Interviewee	When
Ministry of Education	Permanent secretary	2019
	Minister	2019
	Minister	2019
	Head of Department	2019
	Head of Department	2019
Ministry of Justice	Permanent Secretary	2019
	Head of Department	2019
	Permanent Secretary	2020
	Minister	2021
Ministry of Finance	Permanent secretary	2019
Ministry of Industry, Business and Financial Affairs	Permanent secretary	2019

⁴ Politiets Efterretningstjeneste.

Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior	Permanent secretary	2019
	Head of Department	2019
	Head of Department	2019
Ministry of Health	Permanent Secretary	2019
Ministry of Environment and Food	Permanent Secretary	2019
Ministry of Climate, Energy, and Utilities	Permanent secretary	2019
	Head of Department	2019
	Head of Department	2019
	Head of Department	2019
	Minister	2020
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Permanent secretary	2020
	Minister	2021
Ministry of Employment	Permanent secretary	2020
	Head of Department	2020
	Head of Department	2020
	Head of Department	2020
	Head of Department	2020
The Prime Minister's Office	Permanent secretary*	2020
Ministry of Integration and Immigration	Permanent secretary	2020
	Head of Department	2020
	Head of Department	2020
	Minister	2020
Ministry of Culture	Permanent secretary	2020
Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs	Permanent secretary	2020
Ministry of Taxation	Permanent secretary	2020
	Head of Department	2021
	Minister	2021
Ministry of Higher Education and Science	Permanent secretary*	2020
	Permanent secretary	2020
	Minister	2021
Ministry of Transport and Housing	Permanent secretary	2020

Notes: So far, two permanent secretaries and two ministers have declined to participate in an interview. I strive to interview the permanent secretary for 1 hour and other interviewees for 30 minutes.

Table 3.3 gives an overview of whether the ministers had a regular seat at the standing government committees. Some ministries were not regular members of any standing government committees, while others were members of several. I strived to visit ministries with different type of memberships in the standing government committees in order to get a broader understanding of how they work and an understanding of the informal norms surrounding the

work in them. Also, membership usually signals something about the ministry's status in the current government.

Table 3.3: Regular seats in standing government committees

Ministry	Coordination committee	Finance committee	Member of other committees
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark	X		X
Ministry of Justice	X		X
Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior		X	
Ministry of Taxation	X	X	X
Ministry of Climate, Energy, and Utilities		X	X
Ministry of Employment		X	
Ministry of Immigration and Integration			
Ministry of Children and Education			

Note: This was true when the fieldwork in the given ministry was conducted. It might have been subject to change during the collection of empirical material in general.

After the case selection, the data generation began. In the following paragraphs, I will elaborate on the advantages and challenges of using shadowing and interview as methods.

3.4 Data generation

This dissertation is based on data generated by shadowing and interviewing. During the shadowing, I gained access to the permanent secretary's calendar for the given day. As table 3.4 illustrates, relying on diaries alone can lead to inadequate conclusions about how the permanent secretaries spend their time. Shadowing allowed me to observe the permanent secretary's schedule and thereby make a very accurate account of the permanent secretary's day, which also includes details on encounters that are not listed in the diary. Another advantage of shadowing is that it can tell us something about the encounter and the permanent secretary's role in the encounter, which can be difficult to investigate with other methods. Shadowing allows me to study the characteristics of the encounter, for instance whether the permanent secretary delivers factual advice or more politicized advice to the minister. I will elaborate on shadowing in the next paragraphs.

Table 3.4: Example of the permanent secretary's calendar versus reality

Planned in the calendar on the morning		Observed schedule
8.00- 9.00		8.30-8.45 PS is reading and preparing cases 8.45-9.05 PS and CS ₁ discuss M's presentation for next week
9.00- 10.00	9.30-10.30 Meeting with the political spokesmen from the government parties	9.05-9.30 Various preparation for the day in the office (including reading cases) 9.30-9.45 Short meeting with HoD ₁ on HR-matter 9.45-10.10 Preparatory meeting with HoD ₂ , SA, CS ₁ , CS ₂ (M arrives 10 minutes before the meeting ends)
10.00- 11.00		10.10-10.50 Meeting with the political spokesmen from the government parties 10.50-11.00 PS in office (making calls)
11.00- 12.00		11.00-11.25 PS briefs M on miscellaneous cases 11.25-11.30 PS briefs me on the matter 11.30-11.40 PS in office (making calls) 11.40-11.45 PS briefs M 11.45-12.00 Short meeting with HoD ₁ on HR-matter
12.00- 13.00		12.00-12.20 PS and CS ₁ discuss M's presentation for next week 12.20-12.25 PS is having lunch 12.25-12.45 HoD ₃ arrives unannounced to discuss case with PS 12.45-12.55 PS lunch 12.55-13.00 PS briefs me on meeting with HoD ₃
13.00- 14.00	13.00-13.30 Meeting with M	13.00-13.20 PS handles cases in the case handling system 13.20-13.30 PS and CS ₁ discuss M's presentation for next week 13.30-13.45 PS handles cases in the case handling system 13.45-13.55 PS briefs me 13.55-14.05 PS and CS ₁
14.00- 15.00		14.05-14.45 Meeting on M's presentation for next week. Present: M, PS, CS ₁ , SA, CS ₃ , and MS ₁ 14.45-15.00 PS
15.00- 16.00		15.00-15.20 Discussion on specific case. Present: PS, MS ₂ , CS ₁ , HoD ₃ , CS ₄ , CS ₅ 15.20-16.05 PS is handling case in the case handling system.

16.00- 17.00	16.05-16.15 PS briefs me
	16.15-17.00 PS is preparing for a speech he is giving tomorrow
17.00- 18.00	17.00-17.05 PS and CS ₁ discuss the minister's presentation
	17.05-17.10 PS briefs me
	17.10-17.30 PS is preparing speech
	17.30-17.40 PS meeting with CS ₆ on the speech tomorrow
	17.40-18.00 PS continues preparation

Note: PS = permanent secretary, M = minister, CS = civil servant, HoD = head of department, SA = special advisor, MS = Secretary to the minister.

Source: Schedule for the permanent secretary given to me on the morning of the observation. Observation data collected in a Danish Ministry, 2018-2020.

One can distinguish between two types of ethnography: studying down or studying up (Rhodes, 2016a, pp. 171-176). The majority of studies that use ethnography in political science study down, i.e. study teachers, frontline workers etc., but some study up, i.e. study political elites such as politicians, top civil servants, and managers (See eg. Fenno, 1990; Mintzberg, 1971; Rhodes, 2011). This study also studies up, which means that the participants, i.e. the permanent secretaries, are more powerful than the researcher. The permanent secretaries control the access to everything from calendars to the field in general, they decide what is secret (i.e. what is off the record), and they control the exit. As Rhodes phrases it: “We are playing a game with a stacked deck of cards, and we are the punters” (Rhodes, 2016a, p. 176). This means that ‘being there’ is a constant negotiation. It is a fine line between being pushy and still being allowed to continue observing. I experienced that I was allowed to participate in more than initially agreed on, when I made the arrangements with the secretaries. As gatekeepers, the secretaries and other civil servants seemed cautious making promises on behalf of the permanent secretary. The permanent secretaries were more forthcoming to my presence. Excerpt 3.1 below illustrates this point.

Excerpt 3.1. Ongoing negotiation of access

I am at a meeting with the minister, the permanent secretary, and the minister's secretaries. We sit at the oval meeting table in the minister's office. The meeting is almost finished, the minister gesticulates to the secretaries that they need to leave. "I think you should come with us," one secretary tells me. I look at the permanent secretary, nod, and stand up with my notebook in my hand. "No, no, no – you can stay for the rest of the meeting," the permanent secretary says to me and points to my seat. So I stayed.

3.4.1 Fieldwork: Shadowing

I chose to use an ethnographic approach with shadowing in focus, because I am interested in the practices and roles that are constructed in everyday interactions. Within the different types of fieldwork, shadowing is not the method most commonly used. More often, one would do participant observation or non-participant observation. However, to be a participant observer would require me to work as a permanent secretary, which would obviously be unrealistic (Czarniawska, 2014, p. 91; 2018, p. 54). During non-participant observation, the researcher observes the participants without taking part in their activities, with the starting point being broad observations about the setting in general. Since I am not interested in observing the activities in a setting, but rather a specific group of people, this did not seem to be an ideal method. I decided to use shadowing, because I am interested in a specific group of people, namely permanent secretaries. Shadowing is a distinct observation technique, where the researcher follows one person in an organization over a period of time, i.e. from the beginning of the working day to the end of the working day, the researcher functions as a 'shadow' to the 'target individual' (McDonald, 2005, p. 2). During shadowing, I write field notes to capture the activities of the participant being shadowed. That is, shadowing allowed me to record the participant's time spent on different activities, the content of conversations, the interaction with other individuals etc. Furthermore, it allowed me to ask follow-up questions to the participant during "down times" (for instance while walking to a meeting) (Bartkowiak-Theron & Robyn Sappey, 2012; McDonald, 2005, p. 3). Hence, I do not only rely on personal accounts, but also get access to the trivial aspects of the role and the things that can be difficult to articulate. This allows me to study the participant in a more holistic way, including the participant's own opinions and behaviour (Bartkowiak-Theron & Robyn Sappey, 2012; McDonald, 2005, p. 3).

During the weeks of shadowing, I strived to be at the ministry whenever the permanent secretary was there. Even though their day sometimes begins

earlier, I usually arrived at 8 am (the earliest time of arrival was 6.45 am) and stayed in the ministry until they left the office, which was usually between 5 pm and 6.30 pm (the latest being 9 pm).

NEGOTIATING ACCESS. There are especially two practical challenges involved in shadowing: getting access and being allowed to stay. It can be particularly challenging to be allowed to shadow compared to other types of field-work, such as participant observation (Czarniawska, 2007, p. 56). Being shadowed can be experienced as tiresome and maybe even stressful, so the researcher must constantly re-negotiate her presence. In other types of observational work, it will be easier for people to have a minimum of contact with the researcher.

It has been time consuming and difficult to gain access to the permanent secretaries. I began by writing an email with a project description directed to the permanent secretary, asking them if I could shadow them for 5 days. It was usually not possible to email the permanent secretary directly, so I sent the email to either to the ministry's common mail, a press officer, or the permanent secretary's secretary. They often seemed sceptical about the project in the beginning, which was probably due to their function as gatekeepers. It seemed reasonable that they might have had different expectations to me (would I come as a critic?), and it possibly made them feel uneasy that the consequences of my research can be difficult to comprehend (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019, pp. 51-56). In order to accommodate this fear, I followed up on the email with regular phone calls to the civil servants, and sometimes I pressed for meetings with the gatekeepers. This allowed me to explain my motives and for them to ask me questions about my study. Usually, I got the same question repeatedly from different civil servants throughout the process: Why this ministry? What are you interested in? Who is participating? Sometimes, the process of getting access was further drawn out if I became a case in the system. It usually took between two and five months to get a definite "yes" to participate and a date in the calendar. Some permanent secretaries declined my request to shadow them, but only two permanent secretaries and one minister declined to participate in an interview.

Nothing succeeds like success and that was also my experience in terms of getting access: The more access I got, the easier it was to get more access. The pre-studies served as both an opportunity to get familiar with the practical life in the ministries and as a way to gain, hopefully, more access. After the pre-studies, I asked the permanent secretaries for recommendations that could be used when contacting other ministries. I contacted the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Justice early on but was initially told that the ministry could not see their permanent secretary being shadowed due to too many classified

meetings. Having a hunch that this ministry was important, I spent some time trying to convince them to participate. This involved many emails, phone calls, and a meeting with head of the minister's secretariat followed by the development of a contract stating the terms for the shadowing. A process that took many months. Finally, the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Justice agreed to participate in the shadowing, and this seemed to reassure other permanent secretaries that they could participate on the same conditions. Excerpt 3.2 below illustrates that I also gained more and more access as I met the permanent secretaries at different meetings. In this instance, the permanent secretary had initially declined to participate in an interview, but when I checked my email late afternoon, I had an email from the permanent secretary stating that in light of the brave colleagues who agreed to participate, the PS now also agreed to participate.

Excerpt 3.2. Nothing gives you access like access

The permanent secretary and I arrived at the meeting, and the permanent secretary invited me to sit at the table. So I sat down next to him and poured a glass of water. Next thing, another permanent secretary arrived at the meeting and took the seat next to me. One month earlier, I had requested to shadow this specific permanent secretary, and while he did take the time to reply personally, he was reluctant to agree to it. He looked very surprised and said to the other permanent secretary and me that he was surprised to see me at this meeting. But he also said that now there were fewer reasons why I could not shadow him, so I would probably receive a new mail from him shortly. Later that day, I got an email where he agreed to let me shadow him.

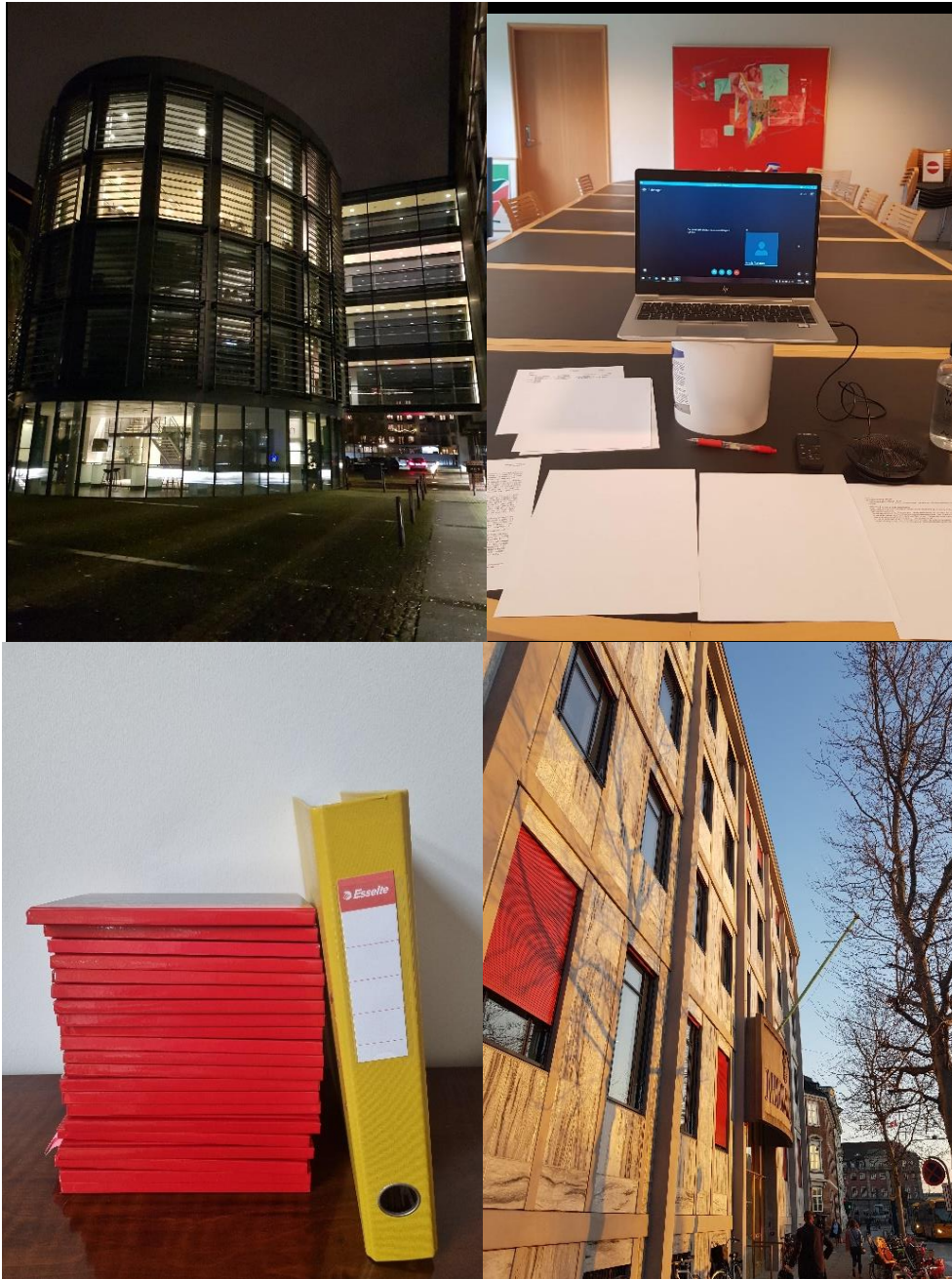
ONGOING NEGOTIATION OF ACCESS. Making an agreement with the permanent secretaries was the first step in shadowing, but getting access is an ongoing negotiation, and the next step was to negotiate how much I could observe. On the first day of shadowing, I usually met the permanent secretary for the first time. That is, the first point on the agenda was usually a one-on-one meeting, where the conditions for my participation were re-negotiated: The starting point is that I participate in everything that includes the permanent secretary. However, the permanent secretary can ask me not to take part in a meeting or ask me to leave a meeting without further questions asked on my part. Finally, the permanent secretary can allow me to stay, observing for background. During the periods of shadowing, the permanent secretaries have used these possibilities to a very limited degree. I have mainly been excluded from meetings about human resource management, one-on-one meetings between the minister and the permanent secretary, and one-on-one meetings

with the head of department. In the beginning, I was not given access to meetings in the preparatory government committees, where permanent secretaries prepare cases for the ministers' meetings in the government committees. However, I have been allowed to participate in one meeting in the preparatory finance committee and several meetings in the preparatory coordination committee. Furthermore, I was allowed to attend the preparatory meeting for the committee of green transition as well as the following meeting in the government committee. I have not participated in meetings in the other committees, i.e. the employment committee and the safety committee. I have not been in a ministry where these were on the schedule, but even if I had, I would not have the security clearance to participate. I have not been allowed to participate in internal meetings with all the permanent secretaries.

Pictures from fieldwork



Pictures from fieldwork



3.4.2 “Being there”: My positionality

When entering the field to shadow, I naturally need to be aware of the ‘presentation of myself’ in the field (Goffman, 1959). Participants in the study, in this case the permanent secretary and the remaining civil servants and politicians in the ministry, will size me up immediately by interpreting my clothes, manners, tone of voice, and bodily characteristics such as age and gender (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, p. 62). Like other researchers conducting fieldwork, I was very aware of my appearance (Czarniawska, 2007, p. 57). I wanted to blend in, but whereas the dress code for men is relatively limited (usually a suit), it is much more diverse for women. Because of the changeable schedule of permanent secretaries, I rarely knew exactly what was going to happen on a given day; how much time would there be between meetings, i.e. would we have to almost-run to make it in time? Would I be sitting around the meeting table with external collaborators? Would I be sitting in a cool office with men in suits or in the sunny spot in the corner? This called for a mix of a professional and still to some degree sensible outfits, which meant I needed to upgrade my wardrobe. I went with blouses and shirts in a classic, yet colourful and modern style to create a professional look. In continuation of this, the shoes seemed very important. It was all about striking a balance between wearing neat shoes, it could be heeled leather boots, brogues, or loafers, and still being able to follow the high pace of the permanent secretary down the hallways when we were hurrying to a meeting one minute before it started. My impression is that I blended in quite well.

Excerpt 3.3. Blending in ...

It is the last day of shadowing in this ministry. The minister’s special advisor is having lunch with the rest of the secretariat. I have just found my packed lunch, open sandwiches, and am on my way to the large meeting room that is also functioning as lunch room. Just before entering the room, I hear the special advisor ask the rest of the group who Amalie, the researcher, is. I enter through the door and one of the other bureaucrats identifies me. The special advisor replies: ‘Oh, I have seen you before but I did not realize you were the researcher’.

Excerpt 3.4. ... but still being visible

The spokespersons take their seat on the opposite side of the table. After a bit of chit-chat between the meeting participants, the minister welcomes them to the meeting. In this instance, I am also introduced (it varies a lot whether I am introduced or just another person in the room). The minister begins the meeting by outlining what they agreed on at the last meeting, and then the minister starts on the agenda for the day. One political spokesperson interrupts the minister and says that she forgot a pen – she only brought lip-gloss. This makes the other participants laugh, and the permanent secretary throws her his pen and is immediately given a new pen by another civil servant. This makes one of the political spokespersons ask the others whether they think I noted this episode down. Everybody looks at me and laughs (what to me seems like a friendly and teasing laughter pointed at the political spokesperson). But it is clear that my presence has been noticed and I am much more visible than usual.

I expected to adjust my clothing to fit in, but other aspects were more surprising. I soon realized that I needed to learn to drink coffee. When conducting the first fieldwork, it made it difficult that I preferred tea to coffee, and it attracted attention to my persona over lunch, during meetings etc. To overcome that, I finally learned, like the rest of the world, to drink coffee. This turned out to be very helpful, since they often did not ask if I wanted coffee, but rather how I took my coffee. Furthermore, trips to the coffee machine also served as moments where I could ask questions in a more informal tone, which was quite useful. Another surprise was a permanent secretary's frequent use of an electric scooter. I had never tried to ride an electric scooter at that point, so I had to go on a trial run before beginning the fieldwork. Thus, the preparation included researching and downloading every app that could be used to rent electric scooters in Copenhagen. This also prompted opportunities for on-the-go-interviewing even though I must admit that navigating traffic on top of navigating an interview was challenging.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MY POSITIONALITY. My positionality developed as my access expanded. While the permanent secretary and the head of departments were of course aware of my presence, I could blend in with the younger civil servants at meetings with others, e.g. with political spokespeople, with civil servants from the agencies, civil servants (including permanent secretaries) from other ministries etc. This was, among other things, due to the nature of the ministerial secretariats and their work procedures. There are many civil servants in each ministry, and the minister's secretariat often con-

sists of a handful of younger civil servants who assist the minister and the permanent secretary respectively. On top of that, there is constantly a high staff turnover in the AC secretary positions, i.e. one has the position 1-3 years. So one person more or less did not make a difference. As I visited more and more ministries during shadowing and interviews, I was no longer an 'invisible civil servant'. On a continuum from complete outsider to complete insider, I was constantly moving towards but of course never became an insider.

One example of the development of my positionality is the depth of my access. In the beginning, there was not even talk about letting me into meetings in the government committees. After a while, I was allowed to participate in some government committee meetings – I even sat at the table. Note that only permanent secretaries, occasionally substituted by heads of department, and the secretary for the committee are allowed in this forum. I was told by several people that never before had an outsider been let into that room.

Another example of the development of my positionality is that more and more people know who I am. In the beginning, I was not recognized by other permanent secretaries, head of departments etc. in meetings. Later, the permanent secretaries would often greet me before (or even during) the meeting, creating visible confusion among the other civil servants in the room. In addition, it made it easier to contact the secretaries who knew who I was.

A final example in the development of my positionality is the width of my access. As described in the section on access, the more people who knew of me and the more people who participated, the more access I got. Realizing other permanent secretaries had trusted me with access to confidential meetings made it easier to get access to other permanent secretaries.

ON WRITING FIELDNOTES. It is not enough to ask questions on the way to the coffee machine or make observations at meetings. I need to capture all this data in a more permanent place than my own memory. Hence, writing field notes is a significant and very important part of shadowing. It is a delicate balance to capture the details and still keep a sense of perspective. However, in order to ensure the descriptive validity, it is very important to magnify the accuracy of the field notes.

Taking field notes was 'learning by doing', and I considered taking notes on my Remarkable, on my phone, on my computer, and on a notebook (Czarniawska, 2018; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). In order to gain experience with taking field notes and to get a sense of the degree to which I could shadow the permanent secretary, I did two pre-studies. I spent four days in two different ministries respectively. During those eight days, I refined the way I took notes.

First, I observed that many civil servants had a black notebook with red corners or an iPad they used to scribble down notes. I therefore used a similar notebook and wrote handwritten notes in order not to attract too much attention. It would be distracting and draw unnecessary attention to me if I brought my computer to meetings for two reasons. Firstly, no one else brought their computer to meetings; they all had an iPad or notebook. Secondly, it would be disturbing and perhaps stressful for the participants to have me clacking on the keyboard. Second, I refined my positioning in the room, and thereby my opportunities to jot down notes during meetings. Instead of positioning myself right next to participants, I began to sit either a couple of seats away at the table or in other seats in the room away from the meeting table. This enabled me to jot down notes without them being able to see what I wrote. Hence, instead of writing notes in the break between meetings, I could jot down notes immediately, which improved the descriptive validity. Positioning myself in the room was surprisingly difficult. There were several unspoken rules, which I only became aware of when I accidentally broke protocol. Finally, from being focused on relatively superficial, factual descriptions, I became more attentive to describing details and nuances in the scenarios. I realized that in order to study the permanent secretary, it was important also to pay attention to the permanent secretary's interaction with other people. Attending to details strengthens the interpretive validity because it makes it easier to make authentic and valid interpretations afterwards.

During the day, I usually wrote down different types of descriptions, both sketches and episodes (Emerson et al., 2011) as well as detached words and phrases. However, I also wrote commentaries down, which were marked with box brackets in my notes. During the period I went from trying to make very accurate descriptions during the day to jot down keywords, important phrases etc. In that way, I had more time to look up from my notebook and observe with my eyes as well as my ears. I often used the time between meetings to elaborate on the notes, write descriptions, commentaries etc. The goal was to jot down as much as possible in order to provide accurate accounts from the day and thereby enhance the descriptive validity. In the afternoon, usually between 4.30 pm and 6.30 pm, the number of meetings would drop – except if there were political negotiations. This allowed me to start re-writing my field notes on my computer while still in the ministry. I would continue re-writing my field notes in the evening or the following week. When rewriting the field notes, I filled in the gaps in the jottings with as many details as possible to create an expanded account. The keywords I jotted down during observation functioned as triggers that enabled me to write a more comprehensive and dense account of the situations. The analysis is based on the expanded accounts.

3.4.3 Interviews

Shadowing is often followed by interviews (Bartkowiak-Theron & Robyn Sappey, 2012, p. 4), and that was also the case in this study. As mentioned, shadowing naturally involves asking questions to understand the motives and meaning ascribed to the situation by the person you are shadowing. However, there is also an advantage of conducting more formal interviews, since it makes it possible to ask questions in a more systematic way, making sure the relevant topics are covered. Furthermore, the interviewees had more time to reflect upon and answer the questions than when they were asked on-the-go during their working day. Thus, while I did ask questions during the shadowing, I also interviewed the permanent secretary, usually at the end of the week of shadowing or soon thereafter. The proximity in time to the shadowing also allowed me to ask questions regarding the week I shadowed. Furthermore, I interviewed heads of department and ministers.

Combining interviews and fieldwork has another benefit. According to Maxwell, interviewing potentially constitutes a special problem to the internal validity because the researcher usually only interacts with the interviewee over a short period (Maxwell, 1992, p. 294). Hence, the researcher draws inferences from this relatively brief interview to the rest of the interviewee's life. By combining interviews with shadowing, I spent a significant amount of time with my interviewees, giving me a more extensive range of data to draw inferences from. Hence, combining interviews with shadowing might enhance the internal generalizability.

ELITE INTERVIEWS. Elite interviews are characterized by the interviewee being in a powerful position (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 147). This applies to all my interviewees, and I partly experienced some of the challenges described in the literature. First, as with the shadowing, it was sometimes difficult to gain access to interviewees. I was often in contact with secretaries who served as gatekeepers protecting the elite from outsiders. I also encountered this, which implied that I had to contact them repeatedly to get a date and time for the interview, several reschedulings, and, in a few instances, I got much shorter time for the interviews than agreed. The shortest interview was just below 15 minutes, which was half of the arranged time. However, most of the interviews were not too difficult to arrange, and I was often allowed to spend more time than initially agreed. For a more detailed description on the process of gaining access, see paragraph 3.4.1 Fieldwork: Shadowing. Second, interviewing experts gives the interviewee the upper hand: the interviewee is in a position to deny access to information, manipulate information, or simply sidestep an issue (Mikecz, 2012, p. 483). I did have interviewees who tried to

sidestep issues and interviewees who did not want to answer certain questions. In general, the interviewees answered most questions, and due to the many different interviews, and by combining interviews and shadowing, and by interviewing several with similar employments, I do not think this affected the quality of the empirical material. Finally, the literature stresses that elites can more easily cut off the interview early, which stresses the researcher's continuous negotiation of access. While this occurred a few times, my problem was more often that the interviewees were late, so the interview started 5-10 minutes later than anticipated and was cut shorter. Because I extended a few interviews as well, I do not think this affected the overall quality of the empirical material.

CONSTRUCTING THE TOPIC GUIDE. In the following section, I will concentrate on the construction of topic guides for my interviews. All my interviews are semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, and they are usually conducted in the interviewee's office. I have made three topic guides for this thesis: one for permanent secretaries, one for ministers, and one for heads of department. Before each interview, the topic guides are modified to the interviewee based on their career, time of employment, and the shadowing.

I had mainly two logics in mind when constructing the topic guides. First, the conceptual logic, i.e. coherence, precision, and conceptual coverage. I strived to create a coherent topic guide that covered the most important aspects of my topic. To get all-round insight into the different roles of the permanent secretary, I wanted to know more about their everyday life. It is especially difficult to cover important aspects of my topic, because I did not know beforehand what was important. This led me to do pre-studies and pilot-interviews, which I will return to later. Finally, conceptual coverage is important, and I needed to cover important theoretical aspects.

Second, I focused on the communicative logic, i.e., on creating the proper structure for my interviews and to ask questions that make sense to my interviewees. I needed a warm-up phase, a core, and a cooling-down phase (Berg, 2009). I always adjust the topic guide to each interviewee, but the generic topic guide for permanent secretaries, ministers, and heads of department respectively is shown in appendix A. In the following, I will comment on some of the points I paid attention to when developing the topic guide. My starting point will be the topic guide for the permanent secretaries, but the same principles apply to all three topic guides.

The warm-up phase has a twofold aim. First, the beginning of an interview is always a negotiation of who is in charge, which can be a difficult balancing act (Ostrander, 1995, p. 145). However, when actually conducting the interviews I only experienced the problems described in the literature once. That

is, in the beginning of the interview, the interviewee avoided answering questions or provided very short answers that I already knew from the website. After a while, the interviewee began to talk more freely. In general, the interviewees seemed to be curious about my project, and the access to shadowing seemed to help on the balancing. Second, I wanted the interviewees to be comfortable speaking with me, i.e. they needed to gain trust in me. A large part of this was done in the introductory briefing where I told about my project, my affiliation with Aarhus University, my supervisors, previous interviewees, and the handling of data etc.

In the core phase, I wanted to cover various topics that I found interesting in light of theory on the one hand and pre-studies as well as the ongoing shadowing on the other. When creating the topic guides, I had four focus points. First, the questions should be technically simple, which means they should be easy to understand. Second, I strived to ask just one question at a time and keep the questions short, which was more difficult in the interview situation than on paper, because I got the urge to talk along and engage more actively in the discussion. However, in order not to ask unclear questions, not to confuse the interviewee, and to maximize the amount of time the interviewee speaks, I tried to focus on minimizing the amount of time I spoke. Third, I tried to avoid to thrust my expectations upon the interviewees at first (Berry, 2002, p. 681). For instance, instead of asking about the permanent secretary's relation to the head of department, to the minister's special advisor, to the media etc., I asked: Aside from the minister, who is the most important collaborator in your everyday life?⁵ This allowed me to get their first impulse, hence their prioritization. Later, I asked about relations I assumed to be important, if they did not come up naturally. Finally, I minimized the purely descriptive questions. Sometimes, it was necessary to ask descriptive questions because there are certain fora I am not allowed to attend, i.e. some government committees. As one permanent secretary once told me: 'that is where all the fun is happening'.

In the cooling-down phase, I want to make sure that the interview ends on a positive note. Since I am not talking about emotionally demanding topics but about their everyday life, this was usually limited to a few questions. I wanted to ask them something that could surprise them, would leave us on a positive note, and still be useful for my research. Therefore, the two last questions I asked were: "If you could choose only one thing, what is the best part of being a permanent secretary?", and "If you could change one thing about

⁵ Question in Danish: Ud over ministeren, hvem er så den vigtigste samarbejdspartner i din hverdag?

being a permanent secretary, what would that be?”⁶ I assume they are not asked these things very often, however it tells me something about their motivation and work life. I rounded off by asking the interviewees if they would like to add something to the interview. This was often an occasion for the interviewee to emphasize something they thought was especially important.

Before making the first draft of the topic guide, I did a pre-study in two Danish ministries where I followed two permanent secretaries around for four days at a time, discussing their work day, talking to secretaries, special advisors, heads of department, ministers, and of course the permanent secretaries in the two ministries in order to get a better understanding of their job. These were followed up by a couple of informal interviews; some taking place in a meeting room, others in the back of a car (full of balloons), or on a train. Based on this, I made the first draft for a topic guide. After getting academic feedback on the topic guide, I did two pilot interviews to test it. This allowed me to see the interviewees’ reaction, test their understanding of the questions, become more familiar with my topic guide, and finally to test if the formulation of questions seemed clear. This caused me to remove one main question and change the wording of a couple of questions slightly.

All my interviews were conducted in Danish, and my field notes were written in Danish. I work with my field notes and interviews in Danish until the final part of the writing process in order not to lose information, as will inevitably happen when one translates text. Thereby, I hope to enhance both the descriptive and the interpretive validity of the study. When reporting from field notes and interviews, I have changed the names of the participants to their position. In addition, I removed notions about the specific content of the cases due to confidentiality. In the editing, I removed examples and changed minor details that could be used to identify the interviewees, for instance location, dates, or gender. Furthermore, quotes from interviews are edited for readability, i.e. ‘err’, stuttering, and different types of hesitation and repetitions are edited out, so the focus is on the punchline of the quotes. Finally, when I have removed part of the writing from my field notes or interviews, I mark it using (...). Sometimes I add something to the quotes for the readers’ understanding. This is marked clearly with [addition, AT].

⁶ The two final questions in Danish: Hvis du kun må vælge én ting, hvad er så det bedste ved at være departementschef? Hvis du kunne ændre én ting i din jobbeskrivelse, hvad skulle det så være?

3.5 Collecting qualitative data during the pandemic

When the pandemic caused lockdown in Denmark, I was collecting empirical material and had planned shadowing in three ministries and interviews with several people. This was postponed indefinitely. The interviewees all had a crucial role in the handling of the pandemic in Denmark, and I found it inappropriate to contact them in the beginning of the pandemic.

I was reluctant to convert in-person interviews to virtual interviews (using Zoom, Skype, or Teams) and phone interviews. First, the interviews were postponed hoping that the situation would be better in summer and fall 2020 and allow in-person interviews. As the months passed, it did not seem to be a realistic strategy, and I started conducting virtual and phone interviews, depending on the interviewee's preference. I was nervous that this would affect the quality of the interviews, because I feared technical problems, and because I consider the small talk and physical presence important parts of interviews. However, since everyone was forced to conduct video meetings, the technical problems occurred less than expected (twice) and were quickly solved. I did find the small talk to be a bit shorter during the online interviews. However, since people were interviewed in the comfort of their own home or their own office, most interviewees seemed quite relaxed and had better time to talk to me, i.e. fewer people seemed to have a fixed end time. Prior to converting to online interviews, I was nervous about two things: would the interviewee feel less obligated to participate, and would the screen create a distance between us? The interviewees' inclination to participate did not change when converting to virtual interviews. Not one participant backed out. I did find that the interviewees were more inclined to change the appointment last minute, but the flexibility of an online format also meant that last minutes changes were less costly than during in-person interviews. Overall, I do not consider the quality of the different formats to vary substantially.

Seven months after the first lockdown, I conducted fieldwork again. I made sure to get a negative corona test before going in the field (every time), and the latest additions to my bag of fieldwork essentials were facemasks and hand sanitizer. When I entered the ministries, there were some noteworthy changes to everyday life during Covid-19, e.g. many employees were working from home, several meetings were conducted as virtual meetings, and some work procedures were altered to accommodate the new state of affairs. While the permanent secretaries were influenced by these restrictions, they were probably among the least affected by the restrictions; they are the last group to be sent home and the first group to be allowed back. Some work procedures changed, e.g. more virtual meetings and the implementation of a meeting with

all permanent secretaries where the agenda was handling of Covid-19. However, while the procedures were constantly adjusted to accommodate the circumstances, I found the substance of their everyday life to resemble everyday life observed before the pandemic. Because many civil servants were working from home, I might have experienced fewer encounters between the permanent secretary and lower-ranking civil servants. While many of us are tired of the video meetings, they did provide some opportunities for me in the fieldwork. First, the meeting participants might not notice my presence at all, because I would usually sit in the fringe of the frame or outside the camera angle. Hence, I have reason to assume that my presence did not alter the behaviour of the meeting participants sitting on the other side of the screen. Moreover, I sometimes got more information about the civil servants' thoughts during video meetings, because they could mute the microphone and talk quietly among themselves (instead of whispering during the physical meetings, which I could not hear). Overall, I do not think the quality of the empirical material was lowered because of the pandemic, because even though some things were less visible, other things became clearer.

In sum, even though the pandemic created insecurity in terms of collecting my empirical material, I managed to shadow two permanent secretaries during the pandemic and completed more than 10 interviews. The shadowing of one permanent secretary could not be carried through as planned due to repeated lockdowns. I do not have reason to believe this will affect the reflections on transferability substantially.

3.6 Transcription and analysis

I was allowed to audio record all but two interviews using a dictaphone. This allowed me to focus on 'being there' during the interview, i.e. to concentrate on the topic guide and to listen to the interviewee. The interviews were transcribed by two student assistants and me. I chose to transcribe some interviews myself for three reasons: to become more familiar with the interviews; to become aware of what I can improve as an interviewer; and for the sake of confidentiality for some of the interviewees. In order to enhance the descriptive validity, I constructed a guide for transcription (see appendix B). The interviews have been transcribed verbatim, i.e. I have transcribed all the 'err', 'mmh', and so on (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 180-181). Furthermore, laughter and pauses were transcribed to enhance the precision of the interpretation of the material. I plan to transcribe all interviews myself, but this will take place over a long period, and I developed a transcription guide in order to secure homogenous transcription (see appendix B).

All material, i.e., field notes and transcribed interviews, was imported into NVivo 12, which I have used for the coding. The coding approach is inspired by Charmaz' grounded theory approach to coding (Charmaz, 2014). I made an open line-by-line coding of seven interviews: three interviews with permanent secretaries, two interviews with heads of department, and two with ministers. During this first round of coding, I tried to stay close to the original quotes. I did in vivo coding, process coding [other forms of coding]. Table 3.5 shows the amount of codes during this first round of coding.

Table 3.5: First round of coding

Who	Codes	References
Permanent secretary 1	279 codes	302 references
Permanent secretary 2	409 codes	488 references
Permanent secretary 3	424 codes	516 references
Head of Department 1	184 codes	218 references
Head of Department 2	265 codes	297 references
Minister 1	209 codes	244 references
Minister 2	137 codes	167 references
Total	1,972 codes	2,232 references

Concurrent with the line-by-line coding, I created memos to collect themes and thoughts that arose during the coding process. The memos were a combination of theoretical notions and empirical observations, reflections on coherence and differences, collecting new ideas, and elaborating on analytical thoughts. Thus, I still have my theoretical concepts and theories in mind while coding. This is reflected in the memos I write concurrently and in the transformation of open codes to closed codes. As Dey (2001 [1999], p. 251) remarks, "there is a difference between having an open mind and an empty head". The first round of coding ended up with 1,972 codes, which I then clustered in order to create new, broader codes to reflect and capture the different aspects of the data and keeping the theoretical knowledge in mind. The codes were further reduced, keeping the theoretical knowledge and the research question in mind. This led me to a draft of the closed coding list, where I reduced the codes to 373 codes, of which one 'Other' code contained 210 codes. I condensed it one more time and edited the codes a bit when I coded the first interviews. Thus, I ended up with a final list of 178 codes, which can be found in appendix C.

TRANSLATION OF QUOTES AND EXCERPTS. Translating the quotes and fieldwork excerpts could lead to loss of information. Hence, I kept the quotes and excerpt in Danish for as long as possible to avoid unnecessary loss of nuances, hence enhancing the descriptive and interpretive validity. The quotes and excerpts were translated during the editing of the chapters, and the responsibility for the translation is mine. I have not translated the quotes word by word, but tried to maintain the essence of the quote, while staying as close to the original quote as possible.

ROBUSTNESS. Throughout the different stages of creating this dissertation, the robustness of my findings have been a recurring theme. Throughout this chapter, I have described different strategies employed to enhance the overall validity of my accounts. It is inherent in the interpretivist approach that the findings I present are a ‘partial view’ (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012; Ybema, Yanow, Wels, & Kamsteeg, 2009) affected by my own positionality. Through the collection and processing of the empirical material, I tried to reflect consciously on my own situatedness. Concurrently, the aim of this chapter has been to be transparent about the origin of this dissertation: to be open about the research process, the choices I made, the handling of unpredictable events (e.g. Covid-19), the assumed consequences of these choices, and other considerations that might be relevant in order to assess the project.

I consider it a significant finding in and of itself that I was granted access to shadow permanent secretaries, but I was aware of the pitfalls the unequal relation could create: Would I only get to see a polished version of the everyday life? However, going back and forth between fieldwork and interviewing not only permanent secretaries but also ministers and division heads allowed me to triangulate the data. An important part of this triangulation was informal conversations with civil servants ranging from administrative officers to special advisors throughout the fieldwork. This allowed me to capture the complexity of the permanent secretary’s everyday life, the common denominators and the differences in the position.

Chapter 4.

Context: The Danish Central Administration

In the following, I will present some important features of the Danish central administration. The chapter begins with a notion of the Danish election system and government formation, before turning to some of the guiding principles of the central administration. The last part describes the organization of the ministries.

4.1 Government formation

In Denmark, there are 179 seats in Parliament, and these seats are distributed by two guiding principles in determining the number of seats across ten multi-member districts: 1) proportional representation, and 2) attention to localities (number of inhabitants) (*The Parliamentary Electoral System in Denmark*, 2011). There are four-year election periods in Denmark, but the Prime Minister has the right to call an election whenever she wants. Denmark has negative parliamentarism meaning that the current Prime Minister is not required to have a majority in Parliament to form a government, but she cannot have a legislative majority against her. Hence, there cannot be 90 or more members of Parliament (MPs) who are against the Prime Minister. Denmark usually has minority governments, often consisting of two or more parties (J. G. Christensen, 2006). However, the majority of the empirical material in this study is collected during a single-party government.⁷ After an election, the party leaders will participate in the Queen's round of consultations where they announce who they think should be Prime Minister. Then the Queen appoints a formateur, usually the candidate for the position as Prime Minister, who will investigate the possibility of forming a new government. It is a formality that it is the Queen who appoints the formateur, and in reality, the appointment happens in close collaboration with the sitting Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's Office.

The formateur then begins a round of negotiation with the party leaders in order to secure that she does not have a legislative majority against her. In recent years, these negotiations have led to a written agreement about the government platform that describes the goals of the government with a varying degree of detail (Mortensen, 2019, pp. 137-138). When the formateur is sure

⁷ This can affect the coordination, among other things.

not to have a legislative majority against her, she can be declared Prime Minister.

In Denmark, the Prime Minister has the right to appoint (and dismiss) ministers and the right to distribute the fields of responsibility between the ministers and the ministries (Knudsen, 2007). After the election, the Prime Minister decides which ministerial offices there should be and who is appointed to them. The newly appointed ministers do not have to be MPs: the Prime Minister can appoint whomever she wants. Afterwards, the Queen formally appoints the new ministers. The ministers and their area of responsibility are announced in a royal resolution (*en kgl. resolution*). The Prime Minister also announces *statsrådsrækkefølgen*, which is the order in which the ministers are seated at the meetings in the Council of State. Traditionally, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs will have the first three seats. However, there are several factors that influence the order of the ministers, e.g. whether there are party leaders, the size of the parties represented in government, the members of government committees, and the minister's seniority.

4.2 The guiding principles of the Danish state administration

The Danish Constitution §§12-14 provides two central principles for the organization of the administration: *ressortprincippet* and *ministerstyret*. The first principle, *ressortprincippet*, underlines the minister's autonomy within their ministry's field of responsibility (Finansministeriet, 2006, p. 22). Thus, the minister is the only one who can make a decision within her area of jurisdiction. Not even the Prime Minister can decide what should happen in a given ministry. However, the Prime Minister has one possibility to interfere with the minister's affairs, and that is to replace the minister (Blom-Hansen & Christiansen, 2021, p. 20). While *ressortprincippet* de jure grants autonomy to the individual minister, in reality, some ministers are more influential than others by virtue of their ministry. 'However, the close alignment of the Ministry of Finance (MoF) and the Prime Minister (PM) and his office *de facto* reduces the policy autonomy formally granted to ministers individually and as cabinet members (...)' (Rhodes & Salomonsen, 2021, p. 6). Since the 1990s, the Ministry of Finance has been considered a strong actor in the central administration (L. Jensen, 2003), and they host one of the most influential government committees: the Economic Committee (elaborated below).

The second principle, *ministerstyret*, emphasizes that the minister is the head of administration in the given ministry (Finansministeriet, 2006, p. 9). In other words, the minister can make a decision in every matter within the

ministry's field of responsibility. She is responsible for and can be held accountable for both political and administrative decisions made in the ministry. The minister can be held accountable in a political sense by the Parliament and in a legal sense by the court (J. P. Christensen, 1997, p. 27). The Parliament can give the minister a reprimand to express their dissatisfaction with the minister or can state their distrust in the minister in a vote of confidence. If a majority votes against the minister in a vote of confidence, she will be forced to resign. Usually, the minister will choose to resign before a vote of confidence is affected.

There are different ways to coordinate within government. There are the weekly meetings for the ministers at the Prime Minister's Office. These meetings typically have a large agenda and serve as a last check of coordination rather than a forum for discussion (J. G. Christensen & Mortensen, 2021, p. 138). There is a need to coordinate between ministers and thus between ministries because of the division of responsibilities between the ministries. While there is a lot of informal coordination, it has been tradition since the second world war to coordinate between the ministries using standing government committees (H. Jensen, 2018, p. 111). The Prime Minister decides the number and type of committees and selects the standing members of these committees. Four standing government committees have survived several governments: the Coordination Committee, the Economic Committee, the Safety Committee, and the Appointment Committee. Currently, there are also the Green Transition Committee and the Covid-19 Committee (Statsministeriet, 2021). Even though you are not a standing member of the committees, ministers can be invited to participate in the meetings if there are agenda items concerning their area of responsibility.

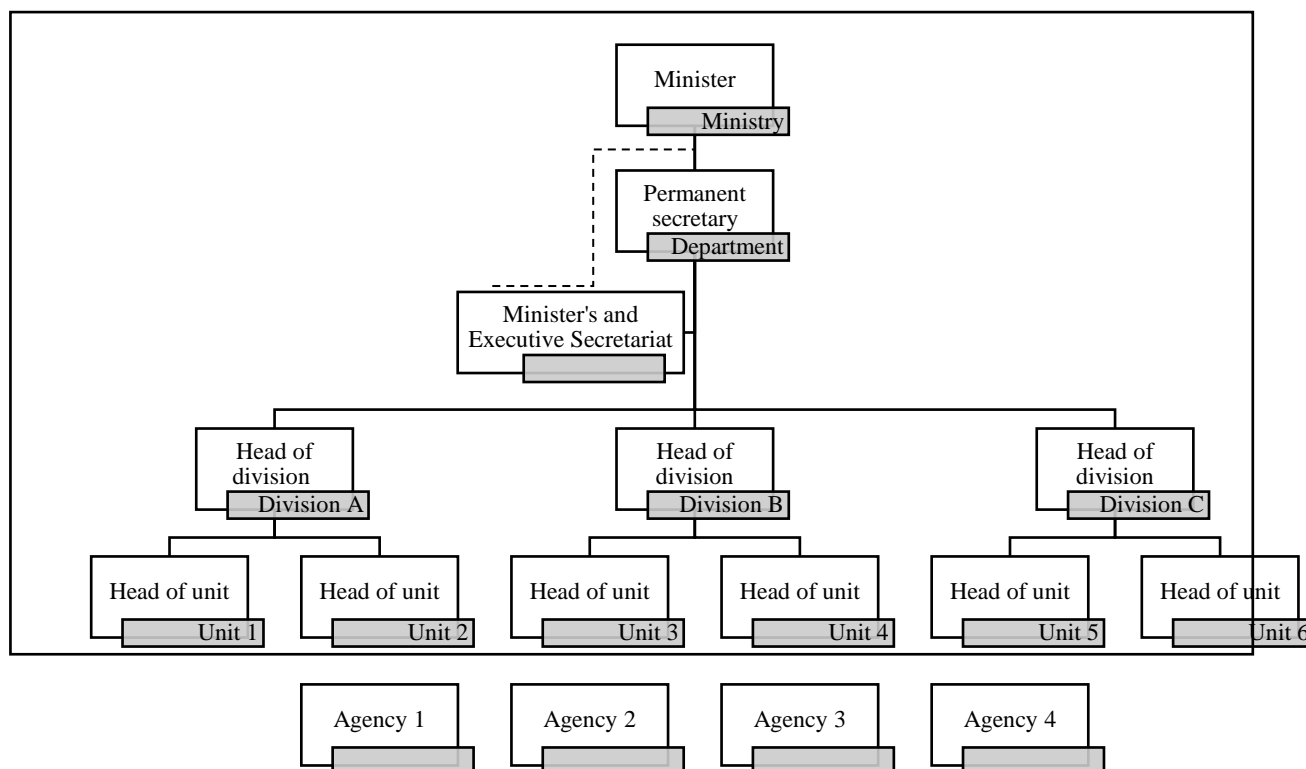
4.3 The structure of ministries

Most Danish ministries are structured according to the department-agency model, also known as the A-60 model (Finansministeriet, 2006). A few ministries are structured differently by law: the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They are organized as one compound without any agencies. The same principle of organization is followed by the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs. Figure 4.1 illustrates the continuum of possible ministerial types of organization following that principle.

Figure 4.1: The continuum of the A-60 model



Figure 4.2: The ministerial hierarchy



Note: This is an illustration of a classic ministerial hierarchy. The number of divisions, units, agencies, etc. varies depending on the given ministry. The specific structure varies from ministry to ministry. The figure is inspired by Mortensen's illustration and description of the ministerial hierarchy (2019, pp. 90-99).

Figure 4.2 illustrates the classic hierarchical structure of a ministry. As mentioned earlier, the position as minister is the highest-ranking position in a ministry. The minister is placed in the ministerial department, which usually coordinates the minister's work, assists the minister in the development of new policy, and prepares cases for the minister (Grøn & Salomonsen, 2020, pp. 127-129). The minister has the power to make decisions in all areas of the ministry and can, therefore, be held accountable for every decision made in the ministry.

In Denmark, the bureaucracy is considered neutral and will, therefore, not be replaced when a new minister is appointed. However, in the 1990s, the spe-

cial advisors were introduced, meaning that the ministers were granted an exception to the rule of all-meritocratic civil service (Christiansen & Salomonson, 2018, p. 67). It is the Prime Minister who decides how many special advisors the ministers can hire, and some ministers (usually party leaders) are granted two (Statsministeriet, 2016). Currently, the Prime Minister has granted herself three special advisors, which is the highest number of special advisors a Danish minister has had (Frederiksen, 2019; Statsministeriet, 2019). The special advisor can be chosen based on whatever criteria pleases the minister, i.e. criteria that are not necessarily meritocratic. Previously, the ministers often hired journalists or other people who were employed in the news media (Finansministeriet, 2013, p. 181). However, during the last 20 years, the ministries have established press units where journalists and other people with expertise in communication are hired. Thus, the communication skills previously lacking in a ministry is now present. Current ministers therefore often hire someone with either a professional insight in their portfolio, with communication training, or with an affiliation to the minister's party (Finansministeriet, 2013, p. 181). The special advisor has to leave their position concurrently with the minister. Technically, the special advisor is positioned in the Minister's and Executive Secretariat, i.e. below the permanent secretary in the bureaucratic hierarchy. In practice, this is of no consequence because the special advisor has direct access to the minister. The special advisor does not have any authority towards the other bureaucrats in the ministry, except bureaucrats with tasks in relation to the handling of press (Finansministeriet, 2013, p. 110; Lykketoft, 2019).

Just below the minister, one finds the permanent secretary. She is the highest-ranking permanent bureaucrat in a ministry and often has the function of being head of the administration (*forvaltningschef*). The permanent secretaries are the link between the political and the administrative. The permanent secretary is hired by the minister, but while there has been an increasing turnover in permanent secretaries (J. G. Christensen, Klemmensen, & Opstrup, 2014; Trangbæk, 2021), studies find that this has not affected the merit nor the character of the permanent secretaries (J. G. Christensen, 2004, p. 31). The position as permanent secretary has been described as Janus-faced because the permanent secretary is the minister's advisor on the one hand, and the representation of *fachwissen* on the other hand (L. Jensen, 2001, p. 72). Due to the interplay between these two things, the 'political' and the 'administrative' can be considered two sides of the same coin, which puts great demands on the permanent secretaries' ability to both engage with political consideration and provide professional, technical support (Smith-Udvalget, 2015, pp. 107-111).

Below the level of the permanent secretary are the heads of division (*afdelingschefer*). They are high-ranking bureaucrats supervising other managers, namely the heads of unit in their division. Below them follows the heads of unit (*kontorchefer*), who are managers for the administrative officers (*fuldmægtige*) in their office.

Today, some ministries are trying to move away from the abovementioned model. There are the same hierarchical levels, but instead of having the different units referring to one head of division, the units are organized in centres referring to several heads of division. This is done to enhance the coordination and cooperation across units, for example in the Ministry of Climate, Energy, and Utilities (Klima-, 2019).

Finally, the Secretariat of the Minister and Management (*minister- og ledelsessekretariatet*) deserves a special mention. It usually consists of a head of unit, two or more secretaries to the minister, one or two secretaries to the permanent secretary, and various civil servants (e.g. the minister's speech-writer and the minister's driver). The secretariat has an important function in supporting the minister's work, including – but not limited to – ensuring there is coffee at the meetings, scheduling meetings, printing briefs, and reminding the minister of this and that.

The agencies are hierarchically subordinated to the department. The main responsibility of the agencies is usually the administration and implementation of the policy within the ministerial remit (J. G. Christensen, 2021). Their organization is very similar to the department, but with an agency head and a vice agency head at the top of the hierarchy, followed by heads of unit and their subordinated civil servants. Most agencies refer to the departments, but others operate at an arm's length of the departments, i.e. the minister cannot make decisions in their area, and the minister is, therefore, not accountable for decisions made in the agencies operating at an arm's length.

Table 4.1 below contains a list of ministries. There has been ministerial reorganizations during the collection of empirical material, but this was the ministries during the majority of the period.

Table 4.1: List of ministries

Ministry	Danish name	Abbrev.
Prime Minister's Office	Statsministeriet	STM
Ministry of Finance	Finansministeriet	FM
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Udenrigsministeriet	UM
Ministry of Justice	Justitsministeriet	JM
Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior	Social- og Indenrigsministeriet	SIM
Ministry of Taxation	Skatteministeriet	SKM
Ministry of Climate, Energy, and Utilities	Klima-, Energi- og Forsyningsministeriet	KEFM
Ministry of Health and Senior Citizens	Sundheds- og Ældreministeriet	SUM
Ministry of Transport and Housing	Transport- og Boligministeriet	TRM
Ministry of Environment and Food	Miljø- og Fødevareministeriet	MFVM
Ministry of Children and Education	Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet	BUVM
Ministry of Defence	Forsvarsministeriet	FMN
Ministry of Higher Education and Science	Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet	UFM
Ministry of Industry, Business, and Financial Affairs	Erhvervsministeriet	EVM
Ministry of Integration and Immigration	Udlændinge- og Integrationsministeriet	UIM
Ministry of Employment	Beskæftigelsesministeriet	BM
Ministry of Culture	Kulturministeriet	KUM
Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs	Kirkeministeriet	KM

Note: During the period of research (2017–2021), there have been various compositions of the ministries, i.e. ministerial remits have changed. This was the list of ministries per September 2019.

ANALYSIS PART 1

Chapter 5.

Work for the sake of what?

The imperatives of permanent secretaries

Permanent secretaries have a very demanding, 24/7 job. But what is the overall goal of spending so many hours in the ministry, reading, preparing for and attending meetings and so on? The permanent secretaries voice three overall imperatives: Make the minister succeed, protect the minister, and good management of the ministry.

The first imperative concerns helping the minister to fulfil their political ambitions and making them appear successful in the eyes of the public. The second imperative is to protect the minister from failure, which includes minimizing risk and handling errors in the ministry. This includes ensuring that nothing unlawful occurs in the ministry. Thus, while the first imperative concerns actively helping the minister to attain their goals, the second imperative concerns an active attempt to avoid something slightly more abstract: errors. The third imperative deals with how the permanent secretaries manage their respective ministries. While the minister is the *de jure* administrative manager, the permanent secretaries consider themselves to be the *de-facto* administrative managers who need to manage the ministry with respect to *both* the short and long term. The third imperative is also concerned with safeguarding the ministry's trustworthiness and reputation; and shielding the employees from the minister, if necessary.

5.1 Make the minister succeed

after all, helping the minister succeed is a principal task of a permanent secretary (PS 8).

This quote illustrates how it is important for permanent secretaries for their minister to be successful. But what do the permanent secretaries believe this to entail? The analysis of the empirical material reveals how the overall goal of 'making the minister succeed' encompasses three sub-goals: to ensure the minister's policy goals are enacted, to ensure the minister's policy goals are implemented, and to make sure that the minister is viewed as a success in the eyes of the public. I elaborate on these sub-goals in the following.

ENACT POLICY. It is a clear priority for the permanent secretaries to ensure that the minister's policy is enacted, whether this be achieved by passing a bill

in the Folketing (the Danish parliament) or in the crafting of a new legislative act, as the following quote illustrates

as permanent secretary, one of your main jobs is to assist your minister and help the government carry out its policy (PS 2).

Almost every interviewee mentioned this as the main imperative for the permanent secretary, and it would genuinely appear to be the overriding purpose of the permanent secretary. They assist the minister in several ways: by providing a solid basis for decision-making and in terms of providing advice; counsel of both a professional and political-tactical nature.

The basis for decision-making is usually presented to the minister in writing. This can assume different forms (e.g., *håndakter*, *beslutningsgrundlag*, *covers*), but I will refer to them generically as ‘notes’ or ‘cases’ in this chapter. Such notes ascend through the hierarchy, the permanent secretary representing the final check before presentation to the minister. The permanent secretaries read the note, assessing whether it is ready for the minister. They emphasize the importance of presenting easily obtainable notes to the minister and that they include the different arguments on any position, as the extracts from two interviews below illustrate:

Our role is to establish, one way or another, some foundations that allow politicians to make decisions. (...) to establish a framework within which politicians can make reasonable decisions that they think are reasonable and that a majority in the Folketing think are reasonable (PS 11).

and qualify decisions, because sometimes it’s just that you might want to do something. Then, when you hear about the consequences of what you want to do, it may occur to you to say, ‘Well, maybe we should do it in a slightly differently’. So that I ultimately achieve what I set out to do in a good and sensible way (PS 5).

According to the permanent secretaries, preparing cases for the minister entails a balancing of specialized technical input and strategic, political considerations. The minister requires help developing policy that can be implemented, including reflections on the feasibility and effects of implementation, professional assessment of pros and cons of a given policy etc. The political-strategic input includes considerations about getting the suggested policy passed in government. It will be elaborated below how the permanent secretaries work to qualify the bases for making decisions.

Additionally, permanent secretaries emphasize the ongoing task of providing professional- and political-tactical advice to the politicians throughout the process from political vision to enacted policy:

If the minister wants to do x, then my role is to support x, unless doing so is technically irresponsible – and then I have to tell the minister that it's irresponsible and try to help them to find another way to achieve their political goal (...) another aspect of that is that you [the permanent secretary AT] can enter the political space and advise the minister about it takes to land these agreements (PS 7).

The quote indicates a permanent secretary who is aware of the need to be knowledgeable about the technical aspect of policy while at the same time acknowledging the political landscape and the game of politics that must be played for the policy to be enacted.

IMPLEMENT POLICY. As regards the sub-goal of implementing policy, the permanent secretaries emphasize the importance of actually implementing the policy once it has been passed in the Folketing:

ensuring that it's actually implemented, both via a political process that gives you the right tools and the right resources. But also that it's ultimately implemented in real life for each and every citizen.⁸ And that's no small thing (PS 3).

Based on the literature, I expected the permanent secretaries to point to this as an important imperative in their work. However, several permanent secretaries underline how, in practice, implementing policy can be really tricky. In one interview, I accidentally expressed my intuitive sense of implementation as being a matter of course, which prompted the permanent secretary to emphasize that this is not so straightforward, as the following interview extract illustrates:

The minister needs to rest assured that the political decisions will also be implemented. As permanent secretary it is also your job to ensure that the civil servants take the necessary steps for the implementation to happen. You should not underestimate the importance of that (PS 18).

The Permanent Secretary underlines the importance of permanent secretaries being aware of the importance of implementation and that they devote attention to ensuring that policy is implemented. The permanent secretary's role in the implementation process differs considerably from ministry to ministry: some have the entire value chain from minister to frontline worker, whereas other ministries only have the policy development in the ministry, other authorities bearing the responsibility for implementation. Permanent secretaries therefore follow up on implementation differently.

⁸ This quote contained a reference to a specific group of people who would reveal the permanent secretary's identity, and it has therefore been replaced by the broader term 'citizen'.

But the permanent secretaries have a lot on their plate, and time devoted to implementation is time away from other tasks. The permanent secretaries must sometimes negotiate their time spent on different tasks with the minister, such as when they are working on implementing policy initiatives. It can be difficult for the minister to get a sense of the resources in the ministry and the time and resources required to implement policy initiatives. The permanent secretaries are aware that they need to find time to focus on implementation as well, as illustrated in the quote below.

You constantly have to make sure to clear it with the minister so that they know that you're not ditching them. But that while they're plotting new things, you're making sure that the old things were actually implemented. So that's a big part of it too – that you're also working for the minister when you're not in the same room together (PS 3).

It is important to convince the minister that they are still working for the minister and the minister's agenda, even when they are not physically sitting next to the minister. During my fieldwork, I was actually surprised that the permanent secretary did not spend more time literally sitting next to the minister, which can be explained in this light.

THE MINISTER IS PERCEIVED AS A SUCCESS. The final part of making one's minister a success is ensuring that the public perceives the minister as a success. Or, as one permanent secretary puts it:

It's important that the minister gets recognition from the public when making results. Politicians have to be re-elected. The rest of us don't (PS 18).

This entails that the civil service should not take the shine away from the minister in meetings, in the media etc. During my fieldwork, one permanent secretary told me that if he says something wise while talking to the media, he should not have said it. And that If he talks to the media and says something unwise, he should not have said it. Which reflects the importance of the permanent civil service not outshining the minister.

The reasoning behind the importance of directing the spotlight to the minister is double-sided. On the one hand, a few permanent secretaries voice the need for success as a need caused by the political desire to be re-elected, as the quote above illustrates. On the other hand, several permanent secretaries argue that the minister's success also reflects well on the ministry.

Essentially, you could say that the success of the house hinges on the minister being successful. Or that the degree of success for the house hinges on the minister's degree of success (PS 16).

I bund og grund kan man jo sige, at husets succes står og falder med, at ministeren er en succes. Eller graden af succes for huset afhænger af ministerens grad af succes (PS 16).

Making the minister appear successful is not the same as the minister being successful in terms of achieving sought after changes. It is noteworthy that passing bills and implementing policy does not necessarily equate to a minister being a success.

Maybe the public sees the ministers as successful. But do they actually create the changes they aim for? (PS 7).

This entails how ensuring that citizens perceive their minister to be a success is a separate task. During my fieldwork, I talked to high-ranking civil servants who told about a recent political initiative that would only solve the politically identified problem to a lesser extent, yet the minister underlined the importance of enacting this specific policy initiative, presumably because of the symbolic value. Thus, some policy initiatives can be important for the minister and their support base, despite presumably having limited impact. The permanent secretaries point out the importance of making their minister aware if this is the case, but they also insist that the minister is within their right to do so anyway.

If you want to do something I think is unwise or ill-considered, then I'll say it repeatedly and very clearly. And if you still want it like that and I think: 'Okay, you know what you're doing'. Then we'll help you with that (PS 8).

The permanent secretary once again invests all their energy into helping the minister, including, but not limited to, providing technical advice, political-tactical advice, and advice on communication.

5.2 Protect the minister

The final sub-imperative focuses on how permanent secretaries understand what it means to make the minister succeed. As the following quote illustrates, success is important, but making sure that the minister *is not a failure* may be even more crucial:

... ministers aren't successful if they don't delivery on policy. But they'll be a failure and will be kicked out if the operation isn't working or if outright unlawful acts are taking place (PS 16).

The consequences of illegal acts or mistakes in the ministry can be devastating for a minister, ultimately forcing them to resign in the worst case.

Consequently, the second overall imperative of permanent secretaries is to protect the minister from anything and everything, including the worst-case

scenario, where the minister risks resignation. To achieve this, the permanent secretaries emphasize three imperatives: ensuring that the day-to-day management of the ministry runs smoothly, dealing with errors and unfavourable matters, and ensuring that the minister does not break the law.

ENABLE THE MINISTER TO FOCUS. Ensuring that the day-to-day management runs smoothly is important. This has a dual function, namely to minimize risks and to avoid taking attention away from the minister's political vision and mission:

if you're not in control of your operation, then the operation becomes politicized (...) when you're not in control of the operation, then that's the one thing politics will focus on. In other words, if you're not in control of your operation, then you [as a minister] can't make policy. We're in control of your operation, that woman [the minister] makes politics. That's her *raison d'être* (PS 10).

De jure, the minister is responsible for the administration of the ministry and can be held both legally and politically accountable. De facto, the responsibility for day-to-day management is usually delegated to the permanent secretary. Most permanent secretaries find it important to shield the minister from tasks and decisions related to the everyday management of the ministry. They argue that the minister has plenty of written notes to respond to and decisions to make. If they can avoid doing so, the permanent secretaries therefore strive to avoid disturbing the minister with day-to-day management issues:

one of the most important tasks is making sure that the basic machinery of the ministry is in order. Basically, the minister shouldn't hear about it. It just has to work, which is everything from handling casework in the agencies without too many mistakes, without overspending, without piles exploding, without the satisfaction of the involved civil servants and citizens plummeting. That the things a minister needs – case preparation etc. – have to function and be of high technical quality. So the basic machinery must run smoothly (PS 5).

The quote illustrates the multiplicity of the tasks of managing a ministry, from ensuring an efficient administration to ensuring that the ministry remains within budget and maintains the quality of service the minister receives. Many permanent secretaries compare this function to being a CEO of an organization, but at the same time having to devote most of one's attention to the board of directors, which in this case is the minister.

Concurrently, there might be an element of protecting the ministry from the minister.

MINIMIZING RISK AND DEALING WITH ERRORS. As touched upon in the quote above, another goal of the day-to-day management is to minimize risk and to deal with errors, should they arise.

Despite procedures aimed at minimizing risks, errors sometimes arise. The permanent secretaries are very aware of the inevitability of mistakes happening, and they emphasize the importance of dealing with them. Mistakes cannot be ignored and must not be kept secret from the minister. Instead, the permanent secretary, in collaboration with other civil servants, should try to ensure that the problem or error ‘runs out of steam’ before reaching the minister:

In an organization of that size, shitty cases will always pop up. If you think differently, you’ll quickly die as permanent secretary. But you can plan ahead to minimize the number of cases – and to handle the cases that emerge immediately. Effectively, plainly, transparently (PS 7).

The permanent secretary voices the importance of minimizing risks while simultaneously highlighting the handling of errors when they arise. She argues that one should deal with such mistakes immediately and up front. The quote also illustrates how both the minister’s position and the permanent secretary’s position are at stake. During my fieldwork, a civil servant told me that if there is a ‘rotten case’ (*lortesag*), the civil service is responsible for vacuum-packing it and removing the smell before it lands on the minister’s desk. In that sense, the minister still has to deal with the rotten case and it is still unpleasant, but less so than before. The errors can take many different forms and be of varying severity.

LEGALITY. Finally, the permanent secretaries must ensure that everything being done in the ministry is legal. Thus, they need to ensure that the minister has the legal basis to act – and if there is no legal basis, they should help the minister to establish it. Permanent Secretary 15 explains this as follows:

I’ve never ever met a minister who wanted to break the law or the rules. So, for instance, you need to be able to say clearly: ‘Well, you can’t do that. The rules are clear, it’s not allowed’. You sometimes have to say that. It’s not fun, but you have to say it. And then the response may be, ‘I want us to go as far as we can’. Fine, then that’s... it’s our job, as civil servants, to say: ‘Well, this [places hand on table] is where the line goes’ (PS 15).

This includes warning the minister if the minister is on the verge of breaking the law and to right the course, if the minister does actually do something unlawful. The permanent secretary must provide guidance on lawful administration and help with alternatives to an unlawful administration. Moreover, the

permanent secretary is responsible for ensuring that nothing unlawful is transpiring in the ministry, including the administration in the agencies.

[one of the most important tasks] vis-à-vis the minister is to prevent some critical unlawful act downwards in our system. I mean, that can cost you [the minister] your job (PS 11).

Rule breaking and unlawful administration can lead to the minister receiving a reprimand and/or ultimately force the minister to resign. While remaining within the limits of the law sounds straightforward, in practice there are often grey zones that complicate the matter.

5.3 Manage the ministry

The third overall imperative is to manage the ministry. This contains two partial aims: being the administrative head of the ministry and protecting and promoting the ministry.

As mentioned earlier, the minister is the *de jure* head of the ministry, not only as the political leader but also as the administrative manager. Thus, the minister can be held accountable for the day-to-day ministerial management, as the following quote illustrates:

The minister is the chief executive. Politically and administratively. Of course, a lot of administration and operation is in my hands, but it's still the minister's responsibility and their call (PS 16).

While the minister *de jure* is the head of administration in the ministry, permanent secretaries perceive this responsibility as *de facto* delegated to them:

Well, that's me, I'm the sun they stare into regarding all that. And I'm the one who gives the speech at the Christmas party. I have to be a good manager for my boss, and I do manage through very, very talented managers, and they are people who sacrifice a lot of hours – a big part of their lives. Therefore, being here has to be fun, and there has to be a direction. So all in all, we have many different tasks, but in relation to him [the minister], I actually think that the most important thing is that he can count on me being in control (PS 10).

The permanent secretary is responsible for the ministry as a whole. This entails being personnel manager for a group of high-ranking civil servants, being responsible for the work culture, setting a direction for the employees, translating between the administrative and political levels, and so on. This task could be a full-time job in itself, and while the permanent secretaries all underline the importance of this task, they usually find themselves spending a lot of their time on their relation to their minister (see Chapter 6). Thus, some

permanent secretaries find that they would like to spend more time on managing the ministry:

Then there's the role of shop manager ... It's actually something I would have liked to have more time for and channel energy towards (PS 15).

The two quotes above illustrate the importance they associate with this function. Permanent Secretary 15 states that she would have wanted to spend more time on this. How the permanent secretaries handle their responsibility to be the manager is elaborated in Chapter 12.

PROTECT AND PROMOTE THE MINISTRY. Besides being the administrative head of the ministry, permanent secretaries also see it as an imperative to protect and promote the ministry. For instance, the permanent secretary represents the professional competency of the civil service in meetings with other politicians. Thus, the permanent secretaries see it as their duty to ensure the ministry's trustworthiness.

You can't survive as permanent secretary unless you also represent the ministry to the spokespersons. And unless they have confidence in you. (...) it makes a huge difference when I speak at the spokesperson meeting and say, 'the gist of the matter is such and such' [bangs the table]. Well, they listen. And it leaves a completely different impression, and I only do it because the way I see it, the ministry's credibility is at stake (PS 15).

This perspective contains two aspects: protect the ministry's credibility and reputation, and shield the ministry from the minister.

The permanent secretaries are aware that they need to be able to defend the ministry's assessment, both advice of a legal nature and the more technical advice. They are aware that the ministry must be considered trustworthy in relation to the political spokespersons, the sector and other external actors. Consequently, it is also important to enhance and build the ministry's reputation within the central administration, as Permanent Secretary 10 explains:

And there's no doubt that for me, it's also scoring points on behalf of the ministry. It's also a strategy to say to them [the other ministries, AT]: 'What the hell? We delivered again!' (PS 10).

This aspect mostly concerns the ability to show the other ministries, especially the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and the Finance Ministry, that this ministry delivers results and can be trusted with government negotiations, new tasks etc.

Finally, some permanent secretaries also emphasized the importance of protecting the civil service and the ministry from the minister. Some mention

protecting the civil servants from being ‘dragged over the coals’ by the minister. Concurrently, the permanent secretary could prepare other civil servants for what could trigger a minister, thereby preventing it. Permanent Secretary 10 provides an example of one minister who was known for their temper:

a personal secretary to a minister once gave the minister the best advice he had ever received, and he has mentioned that many times since. The minister is known for his temper (...) and the minister secretary said to him: ‘You’re the only person in this building who can get what you want without yelling and screaming’ (PS 10).

While I did not expect any outbursts of anger while gathering my empirical data, I did hear stories similar to the one above. One thing is angry outbursts, but during the gathering of empirical data, I also heard stories of permanent secretaries having to defend their civil servants from minister’s trying to make an example of someone. For instance, I heard of one case where the permanent secretary had to put her foot down to prevent the minister from dismissing the civil servants who discovered a mistake, because the civil servants who made the mistake were no longer employed in the ministry. While such stories were rare, I still think they must be mentioned.

5.4 Conclusion

To sum up, the permanent secretaries mentioned three overall imperatives: Make the minister succeed, protect the minister, and good management of the ministry. The imperative of making the minister succeed contains a mixture of the classic bureaucratic virtues, namely helping the minister to implement policy, and some tasks that could be seen as more political in nature, including making the minister appear successful in the public eye. Concurrently, the task of helping the minister to enact their political vision through legislation seems more like a grey zone. The second imperative, protecting the minister, involves shielding them from managerial tasks to enable them to focus on politics. Concurrently, this involves minimizing the risks and handling the errors that inevitably arise. It also includes ensuring that the minister is acting within the law. This is generally done to ensure that the minister is able to maintain their position. Finally, the third imperative, the permanent secretary acts as a manager for the ministry. It is de facto her responsibility to ensure that the ministry’s day-to-day management runs smoothly. Concurrently, there is a responsibility to protect the ministry’s reputation and to promote its credibility – both in relation to the political spokespersons and in relation to the other ministries. In addition, they see it as their job to shield the ministry from the minister, for example, if they have a temper or if they want something ‘unreasonable’ for personal gain.

ANALYSIS PART 2: UPWARDS

Chapter 6.

Relation to minister

Every time a new minister is appointed to a ministry, the permanent secretary needs to begin anew, working on establishing a productive relationship with them. In the following, I examine three particular dimensions of the minister–permanent secretary relationship: loyalty, trust and chemistry. According to the ministerial hierarchy, the permanent secretary should serve the minister loyally. In practice, however, the formal hierarchy does not seem to suffice to ensure a good working relationship. On top of this, the minister and permanent secretary must work on developing the trust between them. We already know that trust is important, so my aim is to illustrate *why* this is so, what can lead to mistrust, and how they work towards developing a trustful relationship between them. My empirical material indicates that while trust is a necessary condition, it might not be sufficient for the relationship to work well. If the interpersonal relationship (i.e. personal chemistry) is bad, their collaboration might also be poor. In contrast to trust and loyalty, which you can work on, the minister–permanent secretary chemistry is considered an exogenous factor that you cannot affect.

In addition to describing these three parts of the relationship between minister and permanent secretary, this chapter elaborates on the opportunities available to permanent secretaries to ‘put their foot down’.

6.1 Loyalty

Formally, the ministerial hierarchy dictates a relationship where the minister is the superior and the permanent secretary is the subordinate. Consequently, the permanent secretary and the other civil servants are supposed to obey the minister’s will and act loyal. Several permanent secretaries mention the importance of loyal service to their ministers.

I’ve had many ministers in my life, and I’m a really big supporter of us as civil servants being able to serve them, regardless of whether they’re well educated or poorly educated, or if they come from Jutland or Copenhagen (...) It’s our job to ensure that they act as ministers. And keeping it inside if we think anything is strange (PS 10).

It is not enough that the civil servants are convinced they can serve different ministers loyally; they must also convince the minister about this. Hence, the permanent secretaries are concerned about assuring their minister early on in their relationship:

The minister must feel that she has a loyal system. She must, of course, know what our task is in contrast to her as a politician and her special advisor, etc ... But she must be completely confident that we're loyal throughout (PS 17).

While the permanent secretary wants to establish clear boundaries between politics and administration, she still wants the minister to be confident of the loyalty of the civil service. Usually, this works out, as Permanent Secretary 14 says:

I think that the vast majority of people who have entered this workplace at least get a lot of respect for the civil service – also find that they work loyally for the minister and try to promote those cases and make good bases for making decisions (PS 14).

As the quote illustrates, a solid basis for decisions is also part of loyal service to the minister. In general, multiple permanent secretaries stress that the civil service wants to treat the minister well, to respect her choices, and to 'tune in to the minister's agenda'. These are also important aspects of working loyally for the minister. It is important that the minister has faith in the civil service not being disloyal, for instance by withholding information or in other ways sabotaging the minister's agenda.

MULTIPLE MINISTERS CHALLENGE LOYALTY. The permanent secretary's loyalty can be put to the test if there are two (or more) ministers within a single ministry. How should the permanent secretary divide their time? And if there is conflict between the two ministers, how should the permanent secretary behave? Be neutral or take a side? Some of the permanent secretaries who have experienced this mentioned those aspects. One permanent secretary mentions that she has been in a position where money needed to be divided between the ministerial remits. However, she believed it could harm the minister's perception of her loyalty if she divided the money between the ministers' area of responsibility. This illustrates how a permanent secretary can find oneself in a difficult situation when serving multiple ministers. But in general, the permanent secretaries who had experience serving multiple ministers did not refer to this as a problem:

There is no doubt that it presents some challenges in relation to how I spend my time. Because they both have some entitled belief or expectation that I will be there with them. There are two ways to deal with it: Firstly, I have delegated some tasks to the division heads. So, they are more involved in the counselling of the minister. That's one thing. And the other thing is that ministers have to accept, in some way or the other, that I only have 24 hours a day. These are the two things: the way we organize it and that the ministers need to spend a bit more time with division heads, who provide some of the counsel when I am not

there because I am with the other minister. So the ministers have to come to terms with that. But it obviously presents some challenges, depending on how the ministerial remits are divided and how natural it is [i.e. the division of time, AT], but I believe we can handle it by structuring the processes differently (PS 37).

While they argue that it presents some challenges, the permanent secretaries argued that the key thing is to match expectations early on and to be explicit about a) the permanent secretary's day is only 24 hours and b) the work procedures will be adjusted to accommodate the needs of both ministers, including the fact that division heads will serve as alternates to the permanent secretary when the minister needs assistance from the civil service. In short: try to convince both ministers that the ministry works to serve them loyally.

Still, formal loyalty may not be enough in itself to secure a good relationship. When asked about her expectations to the work relation with the permanent secretary prior to appointment, Minister 6 answers:

I probably prepared a little for a fight [with the permanent secretary, AT]. But still I wasn't aware of what to expect, because I came in as a minister from a party that has been in opposition and has had very strong attitudes to the area in which I now find myself and have to work with. Therefore, I reckon that there will probably be something (...) We have insanely talented civil servants in Denmark. We generally have very skilled, very well trained, very highly qualified officials. (...) But we also have an apparatus that's so strong that the political control becomes weak (M 6).

The minister argues that she, as part of the opposition in the previous government, prepared herself to 'fight' the permanent secretary. This would seem to indicate that she does not necessarily believe that the system ensures loyalty to the minister. Minister 6 argues that the civil service is very competent, but that the consequence of this can be weakened political control. While this quote is not representative for what all ministers think, it indicates how, in practice, the formal loyalty created by the hierarchy is not enough to guarantee a good minister–permanent secretary relationship.

6.2 Trust

Trust is key to a fruitful working relationship between minister and permanent secretary. When newly appointed ministers enter their ministry, their levels of trust in the civil service vary. While some ministers are open to establishing a trustful relationship, some permanent secretaries also describe how they experienced a scepticism towards- or even mistrust in the civil service. This is not to say that all ministers are sceptical towards the civil service when entering the system, but some ministers are cautious about trusting the civil service.

For instance, Permanent Secretary 32 points to the minister's previous experience as political spokesperson as one reason for an immediate lack of trust in the civil service:

You have to have respect for the arrival of a minister who, in some cases, has been the political spokesperson for their party in the area before the election. So the new minister has seen these civil servants huddling together with his predecessor, advising and passing notes during the meetings, where the new minister was on the other side of the table. One must promptly assure the new minister that, of course, it's going on completely unchanged, now simply with a new minister receiving counsel. A relationship of trust must be built very quickly (PS 32).

Permanent Secretary 10 has a similar experience: Some ministers believe the civil service to be politically biased – either to the Left or to the Right. Some ministers have previous experience as minister where they did not like how the civil servants worked, and they bring that scepticism with them to the new ministry:

There's a big difference in how much trust they have in us, and some come in with a great lack of confidence: 'You're probably blue' or 'You're red, and I've been a minister before and I didn't like how the civil service worked'. And 'You have to at least do it differently' (PS 10).

Thus, it is important for the permanent secretary to establish a trusting relationship with the minister early on.

WHY IS TRUST IMPORTANT? A trusting relationship is essential to be able to help a minister reach their goals. The minister must be open and share their thoughts and agenda – for better or for worse – with the permanent secretary for them to be able to assist the minister in the best possible way. For the minister to do this, they must trust that the thoughts they share will be treated with respect.

I think it's incredibly important that the trust runs both ways. The permanent secretary can actually do a lot for the minister on many lines and edges, but this presupposes that you have knowledge of their agenda. For better or worse. And that the minister – and this applies to all permanent-secretary positions – that the minister can be confident that what you're told will be dealt with properly. And being translated properly (...) But it's also important the other way around: does the minister then bother to listen to the permanent secretary? (PS 19).

As the permanent secretary points out, it is not enough that the minister trusts the civil service enough to share information with them. The minister must

trust the permanent secretary to the degree where they trust that the permanent secretary's advice will contribute to the achievement of their political agenda.

One of the ways trust became visible during observations was when a minister asked for a permanent secretary's advice or opinion on handling tricky, difficult or even seemingly trivial cases – but where the minister could be exposed. Such situations can be difficult to report, however, as trust is often only manifest in a passing glance, a wavering voice that had been firm just seconds ago, and other bodily movements. Another difficult aspect to capture in fieldnotes is the change of atmosphere that can occur in the room.

Excerpt 6.1 below is a very brief description from the fieldnotes, where the minister asks their secretary to ask the permanent secretary about a specific concern. While I cannot display the specific content, I can report that the substance of the case is rather small; it is neither a large sum of money nor a prestigious project. Concurrently, it is important to bear in mind that the permanent secretary has approved the case before it reaches the minister. Still, the minister must feel insecure about the case to feel it necessary to send the secretary to double check. In this excerpt, the minister seems nervous about appearing soft or weak in the eyes of other members of parliament (MPs) and seeks reassurance from the permanent secretary. Had the minister not trusted the permanent secretary, it would have been natural to discuss this concern with the special advisor.

Excerpt 6.1. Political teasing

The minister secretary (*ministersekretær*) enters the permanent secretary's office. The minister secretary is there on behalf of the minister, who is concerned about how to react to a specific case. The permanent secretary says that it is merely 'political teasing' and comes up with a proposal for how the minister can handle it. The minister secretary explains the minister's concerns regarding the permanent secretary's proposal. The permanent secretary proposes that the minister discusses the matter over with another minister.

When talking about the division of roles between minister and permanent secretary, a couple of interviewees quickly mentioned trust in the minister–permanent secretary relationship. It is argued that a spark of initial trust is crucial, but that it must also be extended and preserved for the sake of collaboration in the longer run. The minister must view the permanent secretary as a trusted confidant. However, the trust characterizing the permanent secretary–minister relationship is extremely fragile.

Permanent secretaries make a great deal out of trying to establish a trusting relationship with their minister. First, the minister must trust the permanent secretary. The permanent secretary represents the ministry and is often the messenger between the minister and the rest of the civil service. It is therefore important that the minister trusts the permanent secretary's advice:

My relationship with the minister just needs to be 'top-trusting'. So the thing about on-boarding is to ensure... they just have to trust that I do what I can and I want what's best for them. I don't try to trick or cheat them, and they can completely trust what we say and do (PS 8).

Thus, permanent secretaries argue that trust is a prerequisite to be able to do their work, but some also point to the fact that the path to trust might differ, depending on the individual minister. Finally, a couple of permanent secretaries mention that a trustful relationship with the minister is also important for their work in general. Permanent Secretary 19 emphasizes the importance of other permanent secretaries and civil servants in general believing that the permanent secretary speaks on behalf of the minister when the minister is not present. Being able to do so requires a close, trusting relationship with the minister:

In any case, the strength [as permanent secretary, AT] does not come without trust. That is, you have a minister who has full confidence in you. That you can speak on the minister's behalf. Or at least that the others think that you're speaking on the minister's behalf. You might not have covered something explicitly, but basically you know the minister's position on something (PS 19).

It is thus important that the permanent secretary is able to speak on behalf of the minister. However, it is also important that the minister trust the permanent secretary to talk on behalf of the civil service. This is very important, because a level of trust and confidentiality can be established between minister and permanent secretary that the remaining civil servants can hardly get. Despite trying to establish trust in the civil service in general, one of the division heads argues that there is a special bond and layer of trust between permanent secretary and minister.

We [the division heads, AT] are often present. But it's the permanent secretary who meets with the minister every morning, and it's the permanent secretary who is in closest contact. And when we all sit there, it's still the permanent secretary who 'has permission' [i.e. the authority, AT]. That's the direction in which the minister looks the most, and that's where trust is greatest (HoD 1).

The head of division argues that there often is a special bond between permanent secretary and minister. Nevertheless, when the permanent secretary develops a trusting relationship with a minister, this healthy relationship often

rubs off on the ministry in general and trickles down as trust in the system in general.

All these employees – they go to work every day to provide the best possible advice. And if the minister doubts it, you can feel it in the ministry. The permanent secretary is at the forefront of creating that relationship of trust between minister and ministerial house, so to speak (HoD 14).

The civil service below the permanent secretary also says that it is obvious when the minister does not have confidence in the service delivered by the civil service. Head of Division 14 argues that the permanent secretary represents the ministry and is an important part of assuring the minister that they can trust the civil servants in the ministry.

ESTABLISHING TRUST. While there is not necessarily one way of establishing trust, there are a couple of general points that several permanent secretaries were particularly concerned with when trying to establish a trustful relationship with the minister. One is that the permanent secretaries are often very careful about the signals they might send when appearing in public – especially close to an election. The excerpt below illustrates that they are concerned with how their behaviour will and can be interpreted from a political point of view. Excerpt 6.2 shows how the permanent secretaries are aware of how and where they appear in order to ensure they are not ‘sending the wrong signals’, which is explained by the need to ensure trustworthiness towards politicians in general.

Excerpt 6.2. Develop trust on both sides of the political spectrum

The permanent secretary is on his way home from a meeting in town, so I eye an opportunity to ask about the ‘shepherd’s letter’ (*hyrdebrev*) I heard was sent out by the PM’s permanent secretary before the election. It was supposed to contain instructions on how to behave during the election – what one should (not) do as a civil servant. We start talking about the Folkemøde, as I’ve noticed that permanent secretaries have attended in the past. But that was not the case during the 2019 election campaign. ‘None of you went to that Folkemøde?’ I asked. The permanent secretary answers no and tell that they hadn’t been told that they weren’t allowed to go. But when there’s a change of government, it’s about trying to create trust on both sides. But it was their individual choice whether to participate, the permanent secretary tells.

It is also important to make the minister aware of how the ministry’s success depends on the minister. Permanent Secretary 16 underlines how they work

to convince the minister that the success of the ministry depends on the success of the minister. Consequently, the civil service wants to help the minister succeed as minister, partly also because this reflects well on the ministry:

Our success depends entirely on the minister being a success. Or the degree of success of the ministry depends on the degree of success of the minister. But you have to convince the minister about that. A minister who keeps their guard up – that would certainly be a natural human reaction when they first come through the door (PS 16).

The ‘shine’ a successful minister can bring to a ministry is part of the motivation to help the minister succeed. A more personal motivation might be that a lack of trust can mean losing the position as permanent secretary. As Permanent Secretary 19 says, they have the position as long as the minister gets something out of the relationship. Creating a trustful relationship with the minister is therefore an essential part of the permanent secretary’s job – and lack of trust can mean losing the position.

It isn’t sustainable just to live in the position [as permanent secretary, AT]. You also have to live off the fact that you actually contribute and that the minister feels that something will come out of it. You can only do that if there’s trust (PS 19).

Thus, if the minister does not trust the advice that the permanent secretary brings to the table, if they do not trust the permanent secretary to have their back, then what good is a permanent secretary?

MINISTERS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUST. The ministers also find trust and confidence to be key in the relationship with the civil service. One minister stress the importance of trust in the civil service when it comes to reading up on cases. It eases her work when she knows she can trust the civil service to consider the different aspects of a case, as explained by Minister 5:

I don’t know how many times in the course of a day I have to approve a case or a quote or a letter to someone or something. But it’s a lot. And I read some more carefully than others. The more confident I am about whether it’s been considered legally correct, whether it makes administrative sense, whether the politics are right, whether the communicative is correct. The more I feel comfortable in my stomach knowing that others have made those considerations, the less I have to spend coming to grips with it (M 5).

Confidence and trust in the minister–permanent secretary relationship can thereby ease the minister’s workload, as the minister does not feel like they have to double check the written material. Trust in the civil service and the permanent secretary is therefore important when advising and informing the

minister. However, it is also important the other way around: the minister needs to trust that the permanent secretary will help them to manage the civil service. Once appointed, a minister needs to direct the ministry through the permanent secretary, who is often the one translating between minister and ministry. This requires deep trust, as this minister articulates:

You can't prepare for what it's like to become a minister. Obviously, you've learned something from being an MP; but there are still a lot of surprises. (...) When you come in as minister, there's a leader: the permanent secretary. So you actually step into an organization where there's a leader. But you have to lead the permanent secretary, and then you have to lead the organization through the permanent secretary. It's a terribly difficult exercise. And you can only pull it off if you have a good relationship. If mistrust arises in that relationship, then you're in trouble (M6).

The minister underlines that if there is mistrust in the relationship between minister and permanent secretary, managing the ministry becomes very challenging. When there is a trusting relationship, the minister can consider the permanent secretary their ally, despite knowing that the permanent secretary balances multiple considerations when giving advice:

The permanent secretary I have now is much more agile and much more... I'd say 'a modern permanent secretary'. In the absence of this deputy minister function or state secretary function, the permanent secretaries have to attend to the political part of the work. Because someone has to do it. And the permanent secretary does it, which means that I clearly feel, notwithstanding the fact that he obviously also has to consider the organization, stakeholders and the state administration in general, I clearly consider him my ally, my loyal partner. And together with the special advisor, the permanent secretary is my closest 'employee' and sparring partner in our everyday work (M7).

When trust is established, the work can begin.

6.3 Chemistry

Several permanent secretaries refer to the art of 'settling in' with a new minister. An important element in this regard is chemistry, which is very difficult to grasp. One permanent secretary mentions the interpersonal relationship between permanent secretary and minister as a challenging part of the job; especially, due to the unpredictability of when a new minister is appointed and what they will be like. Permanent Secretary 7 says:

I might see the hardest part of this job as the interpersonal part, where you can say: you never know what you'll get. You can get up early tomorrow, and then there's an election, and then you have no idea who you're getting in through the

door that you have to serve. And you haven't even been involved in the selection process yourself. It can be a challenge (PS 7).

I received the general impression that the permanent secretaries go to great lengths to make this relationship work and to try to compensate for bad chemistry. Their motivation for doing this is mixed, however. Among other things, a bad relationship can lead to unfavourable solutions within the ministerial remit, potentially harming the ministry's reputation or service. The ultimate personal consequence could be losing their job. Many permanent secretaries seem painfully aware that bad chemistry with the minister means that something needs to change – which usually means replacement of the permanent secretary. Several permanent secretaries indicate that their departure would be the natural solution to a poor interpersonal relationship with their minister. Or at least a consequence they seem to accept. This stands in contrast with the old adage in Danish politics: *Ministre forgår, embedsmænd består* (ministers come and go, permanent secretaries stay on), but in line with research finding an increasing turnover in the permanent secretary position (See e.g. J. G. Christensen et al., 2014; Trangbæk, 2021). Permanent Secretary 10 says:

But the ministers are very, very different. And there is some very, very different work. And in my job, where I spend 80% of my time on the minister – or on what concerns the minister – it's absolutely crucial that you have good chemistry. This means that even if you have a very high position, the basis for it may be gone due to something you can't completely explain (PS 10).

The permanent secretary thus emphasizes that the basis for the position as permanent secretary can disappear based on something that is difficult to explain: chemistry between people. Several permanent secretaries stress the ability to be able to cooperate with many different ministers as a vital skill. Yet they make no secret of the fact that their relationship is better with some ministers than with others. It is slightly unclear how bad the chemistry must get for the permanent secretary to be replaced. While this risk lurks in the back of the head of permanent secretaries, it does not seem to be as obvious a solution to the ministers. For instance, Minister 6 describes how she thinks it is a problem that it is difficult to replace the permanent secretary, which she believes creates an unhealthy power relation.

It's a problem that it's almost impossible to fire a permanent secretary. It is a problem for the power relationship that you can't find another permanent secretary if the relationship is bad. Well, hypothetically you can, but it's actually the permanent secretary in the Prime Minister's Office who decides whether you

can fire your permanent secretary⁹. And you can just imagine how well it would go if you, as a minister, have unsuccessfully tried to fire your permanent secretary [laughs]. And as I said, it's not as though I have any desire to do it, or have ever felt that way – but it's a problem that you can't (M 6).

The minister confirms that she would potentially want a new permanent secretary if the relationship between them did not work. While the permanent secretaries considered their own removal a potential outcome of bad chemistry, this minister did not seem to view this solution as so straightforward. Then again, there has been a remarkably high turnover of permanent secretaries in Denmark in recent years, so maybe a new culture is evolving in this regard.¹⁰

While a new minister might challenge the permanent secretary's job security, some describe getting a new minister as challenging but also part of the interesting and dynamic everyday life as permanent secretary. The permanent secretaries stress that the challenging part of getting a new minister is the personal relationship to the minister – not the minister's political affiliation. This was an issue I discussed with the people I met during my fieldwork. They supported the impression that party affiliation means less than the personality and characteristics of the new minister. As Permanent Secretary 3 explains:

It's more crucial how people are as individuals than ... I was just about to say, 'than what they are politically'. That might be one of those quotes that could be bad. But what I mean is that this is what also makes it fun and exciting. After all, a minister is also the head of a huge company. And we are who we are and lead with who we are. And that's why there's such a *wild* difference between them. And that's what makes it fun, and you get close to them as people. So I think it's completely as in any other relationship in a workplace or in life in general – it depends entirely on what kind of a person they are and what their profile is (PS 3).

⁹ Note: I do not know how these procedures work in practice and whether the Prime Minister's Permanent Secretary has the final say. It is included because it is the minister's perception.

¹⁰ During the current government (i.e. from 27 June 2019 to 1 August 2021), nine permanent secretaries have resigned (leaving the central administration entirely), nine new permanent secretaries have been appointed, and four permanent secretaries have been transferred to another ministry. Note that the government merged some ministries, meaning they had to dismiss one permanent secretary when they took up office. Later, the government split up two ministries, which produced two new ministries and therefore two new positions as permanent secretaries, one of which was given to the permanent secretary who was previously dismissed. He is included in the tally of both the dismissed and hired permanent secretaries. Please note that the replacement for the retiring permanent secretary in the Ministry of Immigration and Integration has yet to be appointed.

The permanent secretary's relationship with the minister trickles down throughout the ministry and can affect the atmosphere in the ministry. One head of division describes this as follows:

after all, it's hell on the civil service downstairs if there's a bad relationship between a minister and their permanent secretary. I'd dare to say that you can't hide a bad relationship, either (HoD 10).

Thus, chemistry is not only important to keep one's job or to keep the minister happy; it is also important for the minister–ministry collaboration.

6.4 Saying 'no' to the minister

Several permanent secretaries point to the importance of feeling able to challenge the minister's view. This encompasses both saying 'no' when something is illegal, but also trying to challenge the minister's opinion when the permanent secretary believes that doing so can lead to better solutions and ultimately better policy. By doing so, the permanent secretary tries to ensure that the minister fully understands the consequences of the decisions made and the policy created.

The permanent secretaries are supposed to object if their minister is on the way to do something illegal. The permanent secretary should then warn the minister and be able to stand their ground, despite the possible consequences of a dissatisfied minister. As Permanent Secretary 11 explains:

Because one of our roles is also to say 'this is illegal'. To warn a minister if they are moving into an area where they could be at odds with the law. There, we somehow have to be able to stand firm, you could say. Even if doing so is unpopular. It's about being able to advise the minister about their best interests, even if they can't see the problem (PS 11).

This is also the answer I would expect from the permanent secretaries, because it is an inherent part of the job. However, several permanent secretaries emphasize how challenging a minister's views demands honesty and a trusting relationship with the minister. They claim that these qualities are prerequisites to being able to raise such objections.

So the thing about having a very honest and trusting relationship with the minister – I think that's extremely important. That you can go in and say: 'This – it's only going to create problems. We're writing this paper now, but we'll probably have to work on it. You should also be aware of the disadvantages with this' (PS 14).

During my fieldwork, I also observed civil servants challenging their minister's point of view, and I observed permanent secretaries tell the minister that

things were not possible (see excerpt 6.3 below). However, I never observed a minister trying to push back, so the permanent secretaries repeatedly had to object. This does not mean that it does not happen. However, I would not expect that it would be necessary for the civil servants to repeatedly object to the minister's point of view too often.

Excerpt 6.3 illustrates one of the instances where I observed the permanent secretary tell the minister, 'No, you can't do that'. The minister was quite determined to finalize this decision, but the permanent secretary insisted that an amendment was required. It was not possible to carry out such an amendment at the time, so they end up brainstorming on other solutions. They never reached a conclusion during the meeting I observed, choosing instead to agree to give it further thought and to return to it later.

Excerpt 6.3. Can the Coordination Committee approve or does it require an amendment to law?

There is a meeting in the minister's office between the permanent secretary and the minister. The minister and permanent secretary talk about how to handle a future case. The minister suggests that a written coordination committee case be made. The permanent secretary states that now he is 'the boring one' after pointing out that it will require an amendment to the law. This means that it is not sufficient for the coordination committee to agree on it – the Folketing will have to pass an amendment to the law. The minister asks whether it really requires an amendment. The permanent secretary confirms, commenting that it will be difficult to reach before the date the minister wants the change to take effect. The minister confirms that it will probably be difficult to achieve via an amendment to the law. The permanent secretary then brainstorms out loud about the options available to the minister.

The permanent secretary said 'no' several times over while lamenting that they were now 'the boring one'. This apologetic approach to saying 'no' indicates how the permanent secretary was not really happy about having to do so. Nevertheless, the permanent secretary stood quite firm when giving advice on the matter.

ADVISING ENTAILS EXPOSURE. The permanent secretaries are not alone in pointing out the practice of challenging the minister's point of view. This practice is also mentioned by the head of divisions, who says that the permanent secretary is responsible for making the minister aware of the so-called inexpedient consequences of the minister's desired solution or suggestion:

When there are professional or technical objections, are you then able to actually stand your ground in relation to the minister? That is – to make the minister aware of inappropriate or unfortunate conditions around the desired policy and that kind of thing? It takes a lot (HoD 6).

Another head of division stresses the importance of the role of the permanent secretary in challenging the minister – also when the input might not be immediately appreciated.

And a strong permanent secretary is someone who can ‘dance’ with the minister when necessary. And get rid of the very worst ideas and proposals, but then also create an understanding of the alternative proposals that might exist, without of course having to steer someone [the politicians, AT] somewhere they don’t want to be. But cases have to be resolved. So a first step is to create an understanding of the things that are absolutely impossible to do. But then also in reality develop an understanding of where we can then go, where the minister can be just as happy to end up (HoD 5).

One head of division stresses the importance of the permanent secretary accepting this responsibility in light of the fact that the permanent secretary enjoys greater job security than does the head of division. The division head therefore voices the importance of the permanent secretary’s presence when the minister is challenged.

The biggest difference between a head of division and a permanent secretary, in terms of employment law, is the legal protection. (...) If someone is to feel the consequences of a case, then [the permanent secretary] enjoys some legal protection that the rest of us [division heads, AT] don’t. That means that if you get into a situation where the ministries become so large that the permanent secretary’s responsibilities simply have to be divided, then you also have to think about it purely in terms of employment law. Because as a head of division, there are places I don’t feel like going to. There, the employment law protection isn’t strong enough (HoD 11).

The quote above illustrates the power relationship in the ministry and underlines the difficulty in objecting to the minister’s point of view if the civil servants are not protected from the minister. The head of division argues that while more responsibility is delegated from the permanent secretary to the division heads, she is not protected correspondingly if something goes wrong and ‘someone needs to take the consequences’.

6.5 Conclusion

The permanent secretaries strive to convince their ministers about the loyalty of the civil service to the minister. However, in some instances, the minister is

sceptical of whether the ministerial hierarchy actually works (i.e. whether the civil servants will be loyal to the minister). This is in line with the concerns with subordinates' behaviour in principal-agent theory and with Weber's fear that civil servants' technical knowledge creates an over-towering power position, for which reason formal loyalty might not be enough. According to the interviewees, the working relationship requires something more: trust. Thus, trust is a necessary condition for a well-functioning relationship between minister and permanent secretary. But is it also a sufficient condition? Not necessarily. Another condition that seems to be crucial is the chemistry between permanent secretary and minister. Interpersonal compatibility seems to be key in the intense collaboration in a hectic work life. I find the chemistry dimension to be a crucial addition to the dimensions of trust and loyalty. While it is necessary to cultivate a trusting relationship, the empirical material suggests it might not be sufficient. Because of their intensity, chemistry seems to constitute a crucial component in these working relationships. It is important because it is a major factor towards making a minister satisfied and happy, but also because bad chemistry can spread throughout a ministry and create an oppressive atmosphere and poor working environment. Finally, chemistry with the minister is important because it can cost the permanent secretary their job. This is a very delicate subject, but my empirical material suggests that bad chemistry can result in the dismissal of a permanent secretary or the permanent secretary leaving their position.¹¹ Finally, I find that the permanent secretaries are very aware of saying 'no' to the minister when something is illegal, but also trying to challenge the minister's position when doing so can lead to better professional, technical solutions and policy. I find indications that saying no, can be more difficult if you are lower in the hierarchy and have less job security because there is a lurking fear of an angry minister or a minister who wants to set an example.

¹¹ Note that there can be many reasons for leaving the permanent secretary position (e.g. workload, retirement, new job opportunities).

Chapter 7.

Providing counsel

The debate is ongoing about whether permanent secretaries go too far when providing political counsel and whether this can jeopardize their trustworthiness and neutrality with respect to party politics. This chapter explores how the permanent secretaries view this tension between providing counsel related to party politics as opposed to more general political strategy.

Based on the interviews, I find four types of political counsel: counsel on party politics, political-tactical advice, *fachwissen* counsel, and counsel on communication. It is important to note that while the interviewees distinguish between different types of counsel, they argue that the different types are complementary to one another and that separating them would compromise the quality of the advice given. While the focus is on their own interpretation on providing counsel, the chapter also contains field excerpts to assist the analysis.

7.1 Counsel on party politics

During my fieldwork, it became clear to me that the permanent secretaries distinguish between different types of political counsel that they provide: advice related to party politics and political tactics more generally. As they see it, the line is clear, even though I sometimes found it difficult to understand the difference. In the following, I elaborate on how the civil service explains this distinction (i.e., their own account).

The civil servants distinguish between providing counsel related to party politics in contrast to advice about how the minister can navigate within the government. The reasoning here is that part of the advice on political tactics relates to how the minister is to get their policy enacted, including getting it through government. As Head of Division 12 explains:

as long as it's not *party*-political counsel. That's where the boundary is drawn. Counsel regarding government policy is fine, but party-political [counsel, AT], that's a no-go (HoD 12).

While many of the permanent secretaries with whom I have spoken indicate that they do not get into matters related to party politics, few of them elaborate on what the term covers and what this actually means. Based on the interviews, there seem to be two sides of counsel related to party politics: an internal dimension and an external dimension.

The internal dimension encompasses advice on positioning a minister within their party and deciding on the minister's visions and values. As Permanent Secretary 16 describes, juggling counsel related to party politics and political tactics more generally can be a delicate balance. While there is a brief description of what is entailed by acting neutrally in relation to party politics in Code VII, it is rather superficial (2015, pp. 52-55). One of the specific details Permanent Secretary 16 mentions is that the permanent civil service must never advise a minister on how they should position themselves within their party:

Well, we have Code VII, which states the limits for the political counsel we can provide. For instance, we can't – and would never dream of – start advising the minister about how she can begin to position herself optimally within her party. (...) We can advise her on the best way for her to position herself in the government, and how she convinces the government to move in this or that direction. But there are some very fine – but for us completely clear – boundaries between what we can and cannot do (PS 16).

During my interviews and fieldwork, I noted how several permanent secretaries made reference to Code VII and quoted from it when the subject of advice on party politics came up. I was afraid that they were just reeling off Code VII because they wanted to give me the answer they should be giving (i.e., the 'correct' answer). However, I gradually became convinced that they genuinely believe in this distinction.

Concurrently, the permanent secretaries and the rest of the neutral civil service cannot assist the minister on tasks related to party-related commitments. This includes engaging with her constituents, advice on what to do at party meetings, or generally coordinating any activities relating to the minister's political party:

Well, I can't help if they need some kind of constituency-related coordination or constituency-whatever. Or if the minister is travelling around, talking to all kinds of constituents – that's not something we're good at, and that's where special advisors play a massive role (PS 11).

Code VII mentions a minor exception to this rule, namely if the party-related activities overlap with a minister's 'functions as a member of the government and head of administration' (2015, p. 55). The examples given in Code VII are if the topic of the party-related event falls within the minister's remit.

The external dimension encompasses taking the voters into consideration. My empirical material is less clear on this aspect, and the minister's voters is not a topic that is touched upon in most of my interviews. One permanent secretary did argue that it is part of the minister's job and that of the special advisor to consider the voters in relation to what kinds of actions and policies

will benefit the party. Consequently, the civil service should never justify their advice based on what would please the minister's voters:

If the minister says, 'I want to do this!', I can't just say: 'No, you can't do that, because you have to make your voters happy.' That's more of an analysis of very specific party-political things, and I have to be neutral in relation to party politics. What benefits *the party*, as such – that's an analysis the minister must make personally or with an advisor or party colleagues. But once the minister has made that analysis and says 'that's how it's going to be', then I try to implement it. And that's obviously the party's policy (PS 1).

Permanent Secretary 1 thus argues that when a minister has found the policy they prefer – whether this decision is made based on what will benefit the party, what will satisfy the most voters, or something entirely different, then the permanent secretary should assist in converting the political vision into tangible policy initiatives. If the minister already has tangible policy suggestions in mind, the permanent secretary can proceed directly to helping the minister get the initiative enacted by the Folketing and then implemented. As the permanent secretary says, this policy initiative then becomes party policy, and in that way, one could argue that the permanent secretary is acting politically. The permanent secretaries do not consider this a problem due to the distinction between counsel related to party politics versus counsel related to political tactics more generally:

We *are* put in this world to provide political counsel. We are. We're not put here to be politically neutral. We are put in this world to be *party*-politically neutral. Deep down, that means that we have to counsel the minister and the government for whom we work on how to achieve their political goals. And we have to do so regardless of the political affiliations of the minister and the government. And that's about it for me. Beyond saying that, in order to do so, your party neutrality has to be extremely credible. The easiest way to explain this is in terms of: If we, before and after an election resulting in a new government, are asked to make the same calculation based on the same terms, then the result also has to be the same (PS 5)

This permanent secretary emphasizes that the same calculations should give the same result. But as Permanent Secretary 11 points out, different governments often have different criteria and considerations. Consequently, there will often be different professional answers to the questions because the evaluation criteria and calculation methods might differ ('that's often what goes wrong in the discussion – it's as though there's a single professional answer. And there isn't', PS 11). During my fieldwork, I have never heard a permanent secretary advising their minister on anything related to the minister's posi-

tioning within their party, to their constituency, or to their voters. As mentioned earlier, there are some meetings where I have not been granted access. However, I have no indication of or empirical evidence showing that it is common practice for permanent secretaries to provide advice related to party politics.

The interview excerpts above differ from many of the quotes in this thesis: they are very broad, there are few examples, and they are concerned with what the permanent secretaries ought to do. As mentioned earlier, the empirical material on this party-political dimension is limited, because I first became aware of it quite late in the data collection process. Thus, this section in many ways reflects the permanent secretaries' *beliefs*; that is, their thoughts on the concept of party-political advice. During my fieldwork, I have not encountered discussions about the minister's positioning within their party, counsel on anticipated voter behaviour, or coordination with the minister's constituency. Thus, I have no examples of practices to show. While this indicates that the permanent secretaries practice what they preach, I am aware that counsel on matters related to party politics might nevertheless be given.

7.2 Political-tactical advice

One thing is what counsel on party politics encompasses and in that sense what the permanent secretaries do *not* provide advice about. Another thing is what type of political advice the permanent secretaries *do* provide – and consider to be a significant part of their job: Political counsel, advice on political tactics, advice on political strategy – there are many names. The common denominator for this type of political advice is that the permanent secretaries deem it to be legitimate to provide and something they *should* provide. In the following, I use the term 'political-tactical advice' to refer to all of the aforementioned. The empirical material is very rich on this theme, and I uncover several dimensions of providing political-tactical advice.

Political-tactical advice permeates the daily interaction with the minister, meaning that there are aspects of political-tactical advice in much of the communication with the minister. For instance, I attended a meeting about a minister's answer to a question from the parliament committee (*udvalgsspørgsmål*) (see excerpt 7.1 below). In the meeting, the permanent secretary and the special advisor advised the minister on how she could answer the parliament committee as well as how to handle the political spokesperson who asked the question. This is an example of advice on everyday political tactics. It is not only about the process (i.e., the mechanics of answering a committee question), and it is not only about the professional answer to the question. Instead,

the permanent secretary gives advice on how the minister can deal with the political spokesperson in order to position the minister optimally.

Excerpt 7.1. Internal meeting on an answer to a question from a parliamentary committee

Seated around the minister's meeting table are the minister, the permanent secretary, the minister's special adviser, the minister's secretary, and a civil servant in a black blazer. The meeting is about the minister's answer to a parliamentary committee question. The civil service has submitted a proposal for how the minister can answer the question. The wording has been approved by the various layers in the department hierarchy, and thus also by the permanent secretary. The minister starts the meeting and has some questions about the matter raised by the civil service. The special adviser is quick to speak up and poses a series of follow-up questions. The civil servant sitting next to me, who sounds like the prime mover on the case, answers for himself. After 15 minutes, the permanent secretary speaks up. The special advisor is concerned about whether the minister will be held accountable for some matters for which they are not responsible. The special advisor therefore proposes that the ministry should acknowledge the errors that have occurred. The permanent secretary nods, takes some notes, and repeats a moderated version of the special advisor's idea: To introduce the answer with some history about how it was not previously good enough. The permanent secretary indicates that adding context is a good solution, because the minister can refer to it in the other answers. (...)

The minister says she would like the answers to be a little more prosaic, and both the permanent secretary and the civil servant in the black blazer take note. The minister also remarks that she has written down a question, which might mostly be for herself: Why does the spokesperson ask about it? The civil servant replies that he does not know, but that this is the angle they have taken from the beginning. This leads to discussion of whether the minister should discuss the matter with the spokesperson alone, and whether in that case it should be before or after the consultation that the spokesperson has announced that he wants to convene with the minister. The permanent secretary thinks that the minister should answer the committee question and only take a one-on-one with the spokesperson once a consultation has been convened. The permanent secretary argues that the minister cannot give the spokesperson a better answer, so what good would it do?

The meeting continues...

Note: (...) indicates a jump in time.

The example above illustrates one of the everyday situations in which the permanent secretary provides political-tactical advice. The first part of the meeting illustrates how political-tactical considerations are combined with considerations regarding the ministry's reputation and how the permanent secretary

is a large part of navigating these sometimes-opposing interests. The second part shows a permanent secretary providing considerations about how the minister should continue the interaction with the political spokesperson.

As the example above illustrates, there are political-tactical considerations in many different encounters between ministers and top civil servants. But when asked about political-tactical advice, the permanent secretaries often used examples from the strategical considerations regarding the process of getting new policy enacted. This serves as the starting point for the following, where Permanent Secretary 11 explains the political-tactical considerations:

The other thing: How does that become reality? How do we proceed tactically? (...) First, the minister has to get the government to agree. That's one way forward. And after that, you need 90 votes in the Folketing. How do we do that? And obviously, I offer my advice, and my role is to also advise the minister on how to move forward (PS 11).

Consequently, I have divided the following into three parts. The first concerns how the permanent secretaries deliver political-tactical advice on the overall planning, including particular meetings. Another part concerns the importance of providing political-tactical advice to advise the minister on how to convince the government about the minister's idea. Finally, there is a section about how to provide political-tactical advice to help the minister find a majority in the Folketing to support the suggestion.

THE POLITICAL-TACTICAL IN PLANNING. The permanent secretary helps the minister to plan the overall processes leading up to the enactment of policy, ranging from providing counsel on strategic aspects of negotiations with other political parties to advising on the big picture of the ministry's political initiatives (i.e., the annual work cycle and planning of negotiations). As Permanent Secretary 11 describes:

so tactical, process-related counsel, saying: We typically have a 'year wheel' – how do we push things through? Are we planning the negotiations? What do we put on the table? And when and how? (...) So there I have a role, and there's a special advisor and all sorts of others involved. But clearly we have plenty of experience, because we've tried almost everything before, even when a new government steps in. The minister has never been a minister before. She hasn't tried to manage the negotiation of legislation – and obviously, we represent those who have done it before – and help her with it. But it's always from their perspective, and we test things out for them. And make suggestions. And then the minister and government decide. And it's their right to say 'Well, we do something different than you say, procedurally or professionally. We want this, even though you say there are all these inconveniences'. That's what you have politicians for [laughs] (PS 11).

The permanent secretary thus underlines that whenever advice is given on the process, then it is exactly that: advice. The minister also receives advice from the special advisor and is free to plan the political negotiations as they see fit. As the quote touches upon, the minister might require a little more assistance if newly appointed – also, depending on the special advisor's background, as the special advisor may also be new to the process.

A couple of permanent secretaries underline how providing counsel on process is also about making the minister aware of the potential risks and pitfalls:

How is the political process organized so that it can take place in a reasonable manner? Are there any risk factors in this particular case that need to be clarified? That is, something that can go wrong, something that's uncertain – and this applies to both content and process (PS 2).

Permanent Secretary 4 also notes the need to keep abreast of political pitfalls and provides an example of a project that has been decided on earlier and will affect citizens shortly. The permanent secretary then advises the minister on how to handle the situation and the potential reactions to be expected. In the following example, the permanent secretary advises the minister to be upfront with the political spokespersons about the consequences for the citizens before it becomes an issue in the news:

For example: If we have set aside DKK XX millions for a project that has consequences for some citizens for a limited period of time, then maybe it can't be otherwise. You have to do it [even though it is inconvenient for the citizens AT]. But if the project just suddenly appears [without MP's being aware AT], then a majority can emerge in the Folketing who think that it's wrong and a great disaster for the citizens whose daily lives are affected. So that would be an angle that I'm aware of: Should the minister invite the spokespersons to talk about it? Should the minister involve the agency in a presentation of the project? Etc. (PS 4).

As mentioned earlier, the counsel on political tactics is not only provided during political negotiations. There are numerous daily interactions where political-tactical dimensions are important, such as when handling parliamentary questions, so-called §20-questions, consultations in standing committees, handling the press and so on. Permanent Secretary 5 elaborates on some of the other aspects of the political-tactical advice that needs to work:

The next thing that has to work – that's the political advice. That takes up a lot of time. How do you handle the specific case? How do you handle this consultation? What decision must be made in the area? Or whatever. What type of meeting is needed to solve this? That kind of advice should also work (PS 5).

In this case, the political-tactical advice relates to the handling of consultations in the standing parliament committees, what kind of decisions the minister needs to make within the ministerial remit and so on.

In sum, political-tactical advice also includes advice on the planning of negotiations. Both on a more general level, such as when to place the negotiations, whom to invite, how many meetings there can be before a decision, and on a more specific level, such as when to put different things on the table at the negotiations and with whom one should speak between meetings.

WITHIN GOVERNMENT. The permanent secretaries also consider it to be political-tactical counsel, when they give the minister advice on how to navigate within the government to convince the other government members to support the minister's initiatives. During my fieldwork, including the interviews I carried out, many stressed the importance of being able to 'crack a case' (*knække en sag*), meaning that you need to be able to help the minister to adjust their initiatives so that they can be enacted in a manner that is as close as possible to the minister's original idea. As Permanent Secretary 15 explains:

Being able to help a minister navigate: How do I get a case through? Whether it's in the government or over in the Folketing. That's largely what you help ministers with. (...) It's important to know the government engine room. Being able to crack those cases, solve them, and then figure out how to get something through (PS 15).

This 'cracking the case' concept is discussed in broad terms, as in the quote above or when Permanent Secretary 19 says that she can "contribute a lot in relation to policy development, and in relation to cooperation with both the Folketing and the others in the government and in general." Permanent Secretary 8 elaborates on this when arguing that this includes advice on argument presentation:

The political aspect is also about: How should we respond to consultations in parliament? How should we answer §20 questions¹²? Oral §20s in the Folketing? How should the minister present their arguments in the government Finance Committee or government Coordination Committee? As I see it, this is a core task (PS 8).

This was also something I observed during my fieldwork. The preparatory government committee meetings give the permanent secretaries a sense of the other ministers' positions on a given issue. This enables them to advise the minister on likely reactions in the government committees and to equip the minister with counterarguments. They sometimes also advise their minister

¹² Parliamentary questions.

to discuss the issue with other ministers before a government committee meeting. Pre-empting critique can enhance the minister's position in the negotiations and increase the likelihood of the government agreeing to the initiative.

Another example where the permanent secretary provides advice is in relation to the interaction with the Ministry of Finance. The ministry sometimes needs to request a budget increase, and here the permanent secretaries can assist with 'how-to' advice. Permanent Secretary 1 explicitly refers to counsel on negotiation tactics with the Ministry of Finance when requiring a larger appropriation:

And then the minister must go through a political process: find a majority for it among the parties in the Folketing and get some money from the Minister of Finance. There, we obviously help the minister to arrange the process and provide input (PS 1).

Again, this is done in a bid to carry out the minister's political vision. Permanent Secretary 1 emphasizes that this is 'only' advice; the minister makes the decisions. However, convincing the government about your idea is only step one. The next step is to convince a majority in the Folketing.

WITHIN PARLIAMENT. The permanent secretaries also play an important role when providing political-tactical advice during negotiations with other parties in the Folketing. While they can assist the minister when answering technical questions and following up on questions that the political spokespersons or party leaders might want to pursue, they also play another very important role. During the negotiations process, the permanent secretary's familiarity with the political landscape becomes especially important: They know the political spokespersons and their positions, they can advise the minister on possible moves in relation to the negotiations, and they are able to help the minister find political compromises that please the minister.

Excerpt 7.2 below illustrates how one permanent secretary and head of division help their minister to advance negotiations. These are largely strategic considerations about how the minister can apply pressure on the other negotiators. The minister ultimately follows the advice provided by the civil service, which seems to work out.

Excerpt 7.2. Putting pressure on the other negotiators

The minister is in negotiations with the other parties. There is a meeting on how the negotiations should proceed. The permanent secretary thinks the minister should put pressure on the other negotiating parties by emphasizing that the minister has an agreement with them, and only ask if the others have comments on the agreement. The head of division supports this tactic, adding that the details can come in the actual wording of the law. The permanent secretary notes that it would be wise to mention this to the negotiating parties.

The permanent secretaries are expected to be familiar with the political landscape within the ministerial remit. This entails familiarity with the political spokespersons and a sense of their respective positions on various issues within the minister's remit. The permanent secretaries thus need to have political *fingerspitzengefühl*. This political sensitivity is usually derived from past experience within the ministerial remit, including previous negotiations, from following the news and so forth. As Permanent Secretary 11 says:

It's typically the permanent secretary's person [compared to the division heads, AT], who has a lot of experience and contact with the politicians and thus also what goes on in a room. What works. What doesn't. And that sense of having sat with all these people and knowing them – that's what makes you make an evaluation and say: What you suggested to them there, put that together. If you want to do this and that, then it's more likely to work (PS 11).

This quote underlines the importance of familiarity with the political spokespersons and having a sense of their positions on different issues, their negotiation styles, and when and where they will draw the line in the negotiations. The importance of knowing the political landscape is also often voiced as a reason to participate in political negotiations. While the permanent secretaries sometimes say very little, they are usually observing the other political actors and taking notes – either making mental notes or scribbling down actual notes. This enables them to advise their minister on potential strategies moving forward.

It also comes with experience. To make a political settlement, you must be able to give and take and find compromises. The very best is to make a political agreement that everyone can see themselves as part of, which is also based on sound and professional principles. So it's about being able to help in the subsequent process. I don't necessarily say much in those meetings, but I listen and sense: What's being said? And can you see a path forward? (PS 14).

In this quote, it is noteworthy that the permanent secretary says that the very best is to make a political agreement that everyone can see themselves as part

of, which is also based on sound and professional principles. For some, this could be interpreted as meaning that they aim at reaching a broad agreement. While this may be true, I think this particular quote reflects the craft of making an agreement where the minister gets what they want while ensuring that the other parties also feel that their political visions are taken into account.

The permanent secretary's experience and notes are then used to help the minister and the government to enact their policy. First, the permanent secretaries use their familiarity with the political spokespersons to map out different potential compromises, as Permanent Secretary 14 mentions above. The permanent secretary then assists the minister in the negotiations process. This includes discussing who to contact first, whom to invite to what meeting, and what it takes to reach an agreement. Permanent Secretary 8 says:

For example, a minister who would like to do [X]. Okay, it's very difficult. But the minister really wants to. How can we do that? How can we create a process where we reach something that can hold water and that is professionally sound and solid, and which we can probably get political support for? And those two things are connected. So, there is the professional, technical process, but there is also some of the process that is political. How and when do we start with the spokespersons? What do we discuss with them? What do we say to them? All that stuff. The counselling also regards the negotiations. This is especially true for the less experienced ministers: 'I think that it would be really good if you talked with this spokespersons and that spokesperson. I think we should start by inviting the spokespersons and talking about this and that or I think we should send this material to them.' All that stuff (PS 8).

The permanent secretary thus underlines how this political-tactical advice – or strategic considerations – are provided from case to case and concern everything from policy design to the interpersonal relations between politicians.

Obviously, the minister usually also has extensive knowledge of the political landscape themselves. In the quote below, Permanent Secretary 1 underlines that ministers often is knowledgeable about this part of the process. Nevertheless, many interviewees mentions that it is crucial that they can discuss the political landscape with the minister, if she pleases.

And then in that political process, which of course is the minister's, but we help with the paperwork, then we also say: 'Just remember that you have to talk to the spokesperson from that party, and maybe you should call her colleagues'; that is, the whole process (PS 1).

The ministers' contacts with and relationships to the party spokespersons vary substantially. While some newly appointed ministers have experience within their remit as political spokespersons, as members of the relevant standing committee or something similar, others become minister for a remit that is

different from the area with which they have past experience. And because it is possible in the Danish system to appoint ministers who are not MPs, the ministers do not always have a personal relationship to the political spokespersons within the remit. In that sense, the permanent secretaries' advice on the political landscape can still be important. In the example below, Permanent Secretary 7 highlights an example where they felt they made a difference in reaching an agreement. While the permanent secretary is aware that the agreement might have been reached at a later stage without their input, one can still argue that they saved the minister (and the other involved actors) time and resources:

In my role, the recent time when we reached an agreement – to have an idea about where the difficulties lie. Have a sense of how, when it was about to break down at the last minute, to say to the minister, 'If you now give this to the other party's spokesperson, then maybe you can freeze the tension out on the wing. And that's what landed the deal, right? So to be able to do that – and to see when to actually put it in play. That's not to say that the deal couldn't be reached at a later date. We might have experienced a breakdown, and then it wouldn't have ended there. But those kinds of things are important (PS 7).

I also experienced political-tactical advice being given during my fieldwork. In excerpt 7.3 below, the minister, special advisor and permanent secretary discuss how the minister should proceed in the negotiation of a specific item of legislation. The permanent secretary and special advisor initially provide conflicting advice. Here, the minister chooses not to take the advice of the permanent secretary, opting instead for the advice of her special advisor.

Excerpt 7.3. Preparation for negotiating legislation

There is a preparatory meeting for the legislation negotiations in the minister's office. The minister, the permanent secretary, the special advisor, a head of division, two civil servants and the minister's secretary are seated around the table. At the beginning of the 25-minute meeting, they discuss various substantial issues, and the head of division answers the minister's questions, supplemented by the two officials if the questions concern details. The permanent secretary also chimes in. At the end of the meeting, they move on to talking about process. 'How would you like to make it concrete?' the special advisor asks. The minister answers that she is in doubt and asks what the others think. The minister looks around. There is a bit of back-and-forth talk. The permanent secretary suggests ending the meeting with the less controversial option, so they will end the negotiation on a positive note. The special advisor, on the other hand, suggests starting the negotiation with the less controversial option to get the point over with. The minister listens to both, ultimately deciding to follow the special advisor's suggestion.

Next, they talk about whether they should hand out written material at the negotiations the next day or not. The head of division argues that they should hand out some written material. But the permanent secretary does not think there should be written material for the meeting, as they fear that it will be passed on to the media. The minister says she would prefer not to hand out written material at the meeting. The minister then suggests that the spokespersons will get the text next week. The special advisor answers with a clear 'no'. The permanent secretary agrees and argues that the minister should just indicate tomorrow that next week is crunch time, so the political spokespersons should have the votes ready next week.

In part of the excerpt, the head of division's opinion on what the minister should do diverges from those of the permanent secretary and special advisor. This is noteworthy, because the permanent secretary, special advisor, and minister all seem to share the same idea of how to move forward following a PMO meeting. Based on other observations, the other meeting participants agreed that they should not distribute documents before the meeting in light of information being leaked in the past. Instead, the permanent secretary suggests a strategy whereby the minister can pressure the political spokespersons to move forward.

In summary, the permanent secretary provides political-tactical advice on how the minister can plan and conduct negotiations that will lead to the enactment of policy within the ministerial remit. The advice concerns both the aspects of negotiations during the meetings as well as the important strategic thoughts and planning between meetings. This requires familiarity with the political spokespersons and their anticipated reactions and positions. The ministers' familiarity and expertise with such political-tactical considerations seems to vary greatly, depending on their prior experience.

CONNECTION TO *FACHWISSEN* ADVICE. The permanent secretaries were all very frank about giving political-tactical advice and argued that it was an essential part of their job. As mentioned in Chapter (5), one of the permanent secretaries' presented their main imperatives as helping the minister to realize their policy visions. However, this should be done on a professional basis.

After all, my role is to help the minister carry out their political project. And I can't see the hocus pocus in it. If the minister wants x, then my role is to support x, unless there is no basis to do so, and then I have to tell the minister that it is irresponsible and try to help the minister find another path to attaining their political goal (PS 7).

The permanent secretaries thus consider an essential part of their job as ‘connecting expertise with the political direction’ (PS 11). One of the arguments against separating the sources of the two types of advice is that it would not make sense to prepare a basis for decision without considering the feasibility – and vice versa. Permanent Secretary 16 argues that:

It would be strange if I presented a fully packaged, professionally worked-out case to the minister, only to say, ‘Now you just have to find the 90 votes yourself’. Those things are connected (PS 16).

The permanent secretaries argue that they believe it to be an advantage that someone has this dual role and that it improves the overall quality of the counsel they receive. Permanent Secretary 19 argues that this dual knowledge creates better solutions in the longer run, but also mentions how discipline is required to navigate the duality:

It’s a great strength in Denmark that the expertise that the permanent secretaries represent in my eyes – it somehow becomes integrated in the political process. In other words, you can say that the political-tactical advice is given on a professional basis. I think that’s a strength. (...) I have a relatively strong professional starting point or commitment to good solutions. Solutions shouldn’t just be solutions. It isn’t just a minister who should be satisfied. There’s something that needs to work in society. And we also have a society in five years – how does that relate to the decisions today? I think it’s probably quite unique in terms of decision-making that the angle or that focus comes as far at the end of the decisions, as is the case in Denmark. (...) That’s probably the primary strength: that you don’t have a strong separation, but there’s something professional and something political, and that you sort of mix it up a little more. And of course, it requires some discipline from those involved – that you can separate things (PS 19).

Thus, some permanent secretaries point out the importance of looking out for the minister’s interests, on the one hand, and solutions that will work in practice on the other hand, which they argue requires a combination of expertise and political craft. Not all permanent secretaries present this as clearly as does Permanent Secretary 19, but nobody with whom I spoke argued that a total separation of the two types of advice would be advantageous.

However, as a few permanent secretaries point out in the interviews and as I have spoken with several civil servants during my fieldwork, it is important to be able to say ‘no’. It is a disservice to the minister to encourage the political initiative if it does not meet standards or if there is no legal basis. As Permanent Secretary 9 says:

Being the best advisor is when we also say ‘no’. If it’s because it doesn’t work in practice, then simply insist on the professional/technical aspects. And at the

same time play along, because it's that balancing act that's also incredibly important. I have no other answer than that you simply have to make sure you get the space that you also know other than the political advice (PS 9).

The quote also points out the importance of being able to deliver more than just political-tactical advice. Political-tactical sensibility alone is not sufficient when assisting the minister with political-tactical matters – there must also be a trusting relationship within which expert advice can be provided. A couple of permanent secretaries reflect on other models of ministry organization, but the general impression is that they are not in favour of separating the two types of counsel completely. Again, they argue for the connection between the political-tactical and *fachwissen* advice. Permanent Secretary 10 argues:

I'd be a little sad about a Swedish model, where the special advisors provide all the political advice, while the permanent secretaries are responsible for the area-specific expertise and administrative matters. And that's because it's all so closely related, I think (PS 10).

Thus, the permanent secretaries believe that the best advice is found in an interplay between political-tactical considerations and *fachwissen* considerations. They argue that the two types of advice improve one another.

7.3 *Fachwissen* advice

I think that the most important task, which in one way or another is also the mission statement, is to advise the minister on the professional/technical matters. (...) But it's also a culture, because the values we have here – as I've just said that professionalism is a very, very central value, because it's simply the foundation for the system we have today, right? They must be able to trust the counsel we provide (PS 14).

Advice on the basis of professional expertise is one of the core services provided by the civil service. However, professional expertise is not merely a single type of knowledge. There are different types of *fachwissen* (i.e., technical, expert knowledge) within each ministerial remit. It is important to keep these different types of *fachwissen* in mind and ensure that the content presented to the minister lives up to the professional standards within the given area of expertise. This concerns areas of expertise that are specific for the ministerial remit (e.g., health professionals, education professionals, a variety of engineers) as well as areas of expertise that are used in different ministries, such as legal and economic expertise. As Permanent Secretary 2 explains:

Have we checked the content – the professional/technical matters? (...) What's the substance of the case? Have we checked the economics involved? Have we checked the legal and management aspects? (PS 2).

Also, some argues that they consider the frontline workers' perspective when making policy-suggestions. Thus, it is not only about satisfying the political needs; the civil servants must think over how the policy will actually affect society in multiple aspects. And to ensure a coherence between the specific issue and reality:

We must ensure that the policy is based on the relevant professional, technical knowledge, whether it is about engineers, socio-economic calculations, etc. So in other words, it's about the connection between the case and reality (PS 4).

This comes back to the point that permanent secretaries feel responsible for the ministry and the professions within their remit. Thus, the permanent secretary must also to protect the ministry's reputation, and one of the ways of doing so is to ensure that the *fachwissen* provided lives up to the standards within the field.

It is continuously stressed that the permanent secretaries provide counsel, but the ministers do what they want; that is, if the minister wants to defy the advice of the civil service and do something else despite having been made aware of the pitfalls, then the ministry should follow the minister (unless it is clearly illegal). This does not mean that the civil service should stop making the minister aware that, according to *fachwissen*, this is suboptimal. During my fieldwork, I encountered a situation where the civil service was clearly dissatisfied with how the minister was proceeding, as described in excerpt 7.4 below. Here, one head of division is very dissatisfied with the solution the minister is opting for. However, the permanent secretary advocates that while it may not be the best solution according to their standards, the government has nevertheless decided that this is what they want to move forward with. Thus, while they can keep writing in the notes to the minister that this solution is bad seen from a professional/technical perspective, they must respect the minister's decision.

Excerpt 7.4. Professionally, technically poor solutions

At the suggestion of the permanent secretary, there is a meeting with a head of division. The permanent secretary says that another permanent secretary called the night before because another ministry is reaching a settlement, where part of the agreement must be under the remit of this ministry. The head of division expresses his dissatisfaction with how this is being done and how he otherwise thinks it should be done. The head of division also believes it to be foolish from a professional point of view. The permanent secretary is now becoming rather insistent that one cannot merely decline to implement that which the government has reached settlements on.

The head of division defends his point of view, but continues to refer to another head of division, who is therefore called to the meeting. The permanent secretary is curt and states that while the head of divisions think it is a bad agreement that should be forgotten, the other ministry and the permanent secretary himself thinks that they must live up to the agreement. The permanent secretary says that the Ministry of Finance and the other line ministry must fight for the agreements, and that they will probably end up concluding that it should be discussed by the government. Consequently, the permanent secretary says that one can easily discuss whether it is an unreasonable measure, but that you cannot simply ignore what the government has decided by not living up to it.

One of the division heads appears quite dissatisfied, the permanent secretary comments, questioningly. The head of division confirms, and emphasizes again that he thinks it is a really bad decision in professional/technical terms. The permanent secretary replies that they can write that it is a really bad decision technically, but that it must proceed the formal way (...)

This excerpt also illustrates the permanent secretary's balancing act as the link between the political sphere and the administration. The permanent secretary is indeed concerned with finding sound solutions from a *fachwissen* perspective, however they are also very concerned with respecting the minister's right to decide (cf. *ministeransvarsloven*, i.e., the law of ministerial accountability).

LEGAL EXPERTISE. During the conversations with civil servants, one professional competency was highlighted as pivotal in the ministerial work: legal expertise. Distinction is often drawn between legality and *fachwissen*, as when Permanent Secretary 11 argues that permanent secretaries should 'be able to defend the professional and legal aspects'. A lack of legal basis is not in itself a problem if the minister is made aware of how they currently have no legal basis but presented with suggestions for how to establish it:

The solutions must be legal, and if they aren't, then we must show the minister how to establish a legal basis (PS 4).

During my fieldwork, I also experienced the legal perspective as having a strong presence. A minister can be brought down if they act against the law. Thus, warning the minister of a potential lack of legal basis is an important part of the permanent secretary's job, even if doing so can be unpopular.

One of our roles is to say, 'that's illegal'. It's also to warn if a minister is moving into an area where they might be at odds with the law. There – we must be able to stand firm. Even if it's unpopular. It's about being able to advise the minister to protect their best interests, even if the minister might not be able to see the problem (PS 11).

The quote also illustrates that the minister does not always understand the legal problems, and that it can be unpopular to bring this to their attention.

At the same time, ministers can also be very concerned with legal questions. During my fieldwork, I observed a minister ask about whether a suggested answer to a parliamentary question (a §20-question) was correct in a legal sense. The permanent secretary then asked the civil servants to check up on the matter. This example is explained in excerpt 7.5 below:

Excerpt 7.5. Legal check of answer to a parliamentary question

The permanent secretary would like to talk to the head of division about a draft answer to a parliamentary question (i.e. a §20 question). The head of division is not in his office, but the permanent secretary spots someone else who may be able to answer the question. The permanent secretary asks if the civil servant has time to discuss the answer to an oral §20 question. The civil servant nods, and the permanent secretary explains that both the minister and the special advisor were a little worried about the answer given to a §20 question. They had therefore asked the permanent secretary if he was absolutely sure that there were no legal concerns. The permanent secretary explained that he had not checked the legal basis himself, but that he had informed the minister that he could not imagine that the civil service had not checked it. The permanent secretary had also assured the minister that he would double-check with the civil service. The civil servant replies that the answer should be in order, but that the lawyers had not processed it. The permanent secretary then asks if he can get them to spend half an hour on it now. The official promises to follow up on it immediately.

This excerpt illustrates the attention often paid to legal aspects of parliamentary questions. As mentioned earlier, it can still be very difficult to deliver 'bad

news' if there is no legal basis for a minister's desired solution; especially because some ministers will press for a solution in terms of exceptions or legal loopholes.

Legality is important as a specific type of *fachwissen*, but it is also politically important because it can cost a minister's job. Other professional competencies often leave several degrees of freedom to the minister, and there will often be pros and cons about different solutions with various professional competencies. If you violate norms and professional standards, you may lose the respect of the professional community. If you break the law, the consequences can ultimately be extensive and devastating. Thus, the consequences of missing legal questions can be overshadow other types of *fachwissen*. There are several examples of ministers and permanent secretaries losing their jobs due to decisions related to legality.

USING A DIVERSE RANGE OF *FACHWISSEN*. The permanent secretaries generally need to draw on a wide range of professional competencies in their work. Some of the main points to which they pay attention is to employ *fachwissen* to develop policy suggestions and the bases of decision where they ensure an accurate basis for a decision-making process, shed light on the consequences, and point out the pitfalls. This has also been very visible during observations of how the permanent secretaries prepare cases and their participation in meetings, where they sometimes asked questions about the case regarding legal concerns, the origins of the data, whether the numbers are correct, what the calculation actually means, the assumptions at the base of certain calculations and so forth.

Fachwissen is central when delivering a basis for a decision or policy dossiers to the minister. While the permanent secretary does not have time to check all of the technical specifications, they are responsible for the quality of the counsel. Thus, it is important to have a permanent secretary with sufficient knowledge, preferably one with a sense of what will (not) work in practice, as Head of Division 12 describes:

It's important that you also have some professionally well-founded people to help develop the policy, so that policy development happens based on professional knowledge. It's useless to develop policy in the direction of something that simply can't be done. And it's also the permanent secretaries' ultimate responsibility to help forge and compose something that is *possible* and to contribute with their experience in relation to the possible consequences of going down a certain path. 'This has been tried before'. That is also contributing with knowledge and insight that a minister does not naturally have. So it is to a lesser extent the *goal* that a secretary provides counsel about. Because the minister typically knows that. It's about how to get there (HoD 12).

As Permanent Secretary 11 points out, however, there is usually a variety of advice rooted in *fachwissen* that can be used to answer political questions. To restate the quote that was previously used: ‘there is no single kind of professionalism, and we can easily lend professional/technical support to a Social Democratic minister and a Venstre minister alike. They have different opinions, and they can easily do that with professionalism intact’ (PS 11).

TRANSPARENT PRESENTATION. The permanent secretaries stress the importance of delivering an accurate basis for making a decision. This means that the permanent secretaries should be aware that *fachwissen* is not used to frame the minister’s desired solution as the best- or only solution should this not be true:

You must not use your professionalism to... I mean, you must not cheat the scales. Once you know that the minister wants to go in a particular direction, you must do everything you can to support them in doing so. Including with all of the professional/technical arguments we can come up with. But if there are other ways to go, then you can’t let it appear to the outside world as if the minister has found the philosopher’s stone and that there’s only one professional answer to a question that may have multiple professional answers (PS 16).

Permanent Secretary 16 thus stresses how, while one should support the minister to reach their desired policy by finding the professional arguments supporting their endeavour, they should still present alternative solutions including the pros and cons.

It is not about making the solution look like the only solution; it is also about ensuring that solutions are not misrepresented. For instance, Permanent Secretary 3 emphasizes the importance of choosing the right words and not discussing the matter in abstract terms that blur the consequences:

that the thing about being both common about and telling the politicians what the consequences are of decisions and not calling anything for ‘efficiencies’ that are actually savings – because then you don’t take co-responsibility. And you can always make things better and cheaper to some extent. But at some point there will be consequences of that. Take re-prioritisations, for example, maybe we have developed a habit of talking about that on such an abstract level that the politicians who make the decisions have not necessarily always been told what it is they have decided (PS 3).

Hence, the basis of solution should not mislead the decisionmakers. This includes, but is not limited to, ensuring things are not presented on a level that is too abstract or too detailed, because both can be difficult to interpret. Furthermore, one should not present things in a too one-sided manner.

EMPHASIZE CONSEQUENCES. In continuation hereof, the permanent secretaries point out the importance of shedding light on the anticipated consequences of political decisions. Permanent Secretary 14 highlights how the civil servants should point out the consequences of making different political choices – some choices might be proposed by politicians, but they could also be additional suggestions from the civil servants to meet the political demand:

So they have a palette, a good basis for decision-making. So they know what it means when they make a political choice. That's what has pervaded my way of thinking: that we provide a professional basis for making decisions and the professionalism – it's so extremely important. That they are aware that when they make a choice and shift to the right, they know the consequences of making that choice. And sometimes we make a recommendation, but they actually choose to go another way. But then they have to know the consequences. Because that's their prerogative [as minister, AT] (PS 14).

Fachwissen is the grounds on which the permanent secretaries should make their basis for decision-making. Knowing the anticipated consequences, the minister can make a choice with their eyes open.

In general, the permanent secretaries stress that they are responsible for the ministry delivering analyses that live up to professional standards. As Permanent Secretary 7 argues below, they are not trying to hide the truth:

My role is to provide professionally correct analysis and advice to the minister, which I don't think is that difficult. I don't think we deliver anything that is professionally or technically unsubstantiated or doesn't hold. Or that we try to hide the truth from the Danish people. For the voters (PS 7).

This is also about being honest about potential problems for the minister. As Permanent Secretary 7 points out, 'I've told them at times that the things they came up with and suggested couldn't be done or that it was a crazy way to do it' (PS 17). Concurrently, it is pointed out that this counsel should still be based on an objective or professional basis (i.e., not on personal preferences):

According to the mission statement, you're supposed to be the minister's professional/technical advisor. There, of course, you have to have a feel for how to provide counsel on things. But my sense is that it's extremely important to provide counsel on an objective basis. Understood in the sense that you have to tell the minister, 'there's a problem here, if this is what you want' (PS 14)

While the advice should not be based on personal opinions, it should not be mistaken as assuming that permanent secretaries should not have opinions. Some of the permanent secretaries underline that you can still have an opinion as permanent secretary – sometimes you actually *should* have an opinion. The

important thing is that it is based on *fachwissen* and professional considerations:

So a civil servant has a very clear role – I mean, what your job is. (...) So you have such a big influence on what the papers look like when they get to the minister. You have to have a professional opinion. It must be professional. You have to mean something. So the thing about you not meaning anything, I think that's a myth. You have a very, very big influence on the professional, technical part (PS 10).

You have to know as a civil servant: It's good to have good opinions, but you only have the right to think something when you do so on the basis of factual knowledge (PS 19).

Having an opinion can thus be considered a good thing. During my fieldwork, I also experienced permanent secretaries expressing opinions; sometimes at their minister's request, sometimes offering an opinion without being asked.

Thus, *fachwissen* is an important part of the counsel provided by a permanent secretary to their minister. The permanent secretary should be able to discuss the professional and technical consequences of different political initiatives. Thus, the permanent secretary should be able to discuss a policy with a broad range of *fachwissen* in mind. They share a focus on the legal aspect of the counsel. This is both a very specific type of *fachwissen*, but probably one of the most dangerous for the minister (and potentially the permanent secretary) to neglect, because the price can be their position. The permanent secretaries stress the importance of emphasizing the consequences of different political initiatives to the politicians together with transparent presentations of the different initiatives. The counsel also implies being very clear about initiatives that, seen from a professional-technical perspective, might be suboptimal. Should the minister nevertheless choose to proceed, however, the permanent secretaries believe they should work loyally towards implementing the minister's vision.

7.4 Communication

Most of the permanent secretaries also advise their minister on communication and the handling of the press. While permanent secretaries have their differences, they all seem to play a role in their minister's communication. Permanent Secretary 8 is one of those that are very involved in communication work:

Everything – from speech writing to press management to strategic communications to visual identity – everything. I'm close to that, so I approve all press

releases and all the minister's speeches and talk a lot with our communications manager (PS 8).

Permanent Secretary 8 mentions many types of communication: speech writing, handling the press, strategic communication and visual identity. One of these types of communication differs from the others: press handling. Here, one can distinguish between proactive and reactive communication. Regardless, the ministry is expected to help the minister to navigate the media, as Permanent Secretary 16 explains:

After all, a completely integral part of providing counsel to the minister is to be able to prepare him for his proactive media activity or the reactive activity. It's not my decision how much time it takes up – others decide that. But it's a fixed part of the ministry's counsel to prepare him for it. We have so many media enquiries, also about individual cases and small things, etc. So we have an arrangement, where I don't see all the quotes the minister gives on less important matters, but only where there's something a little bigger at stake, one way or another. And of course it's important that those in the ministry responsible for the press, they make correct assessments. They must ask themselves, 'When does the permanent secretary actually want to see it before we send it to the minister'? (PS 16).

Permanent Secretary 16 explains that they are only involved in communication work if something is at stake and that it is up to the press unit to make the call. Another permanent secretary argues that they get involved if it is either very important to the minister or if the ministry is under attack. Permanent Secretary 15 argues that she would then get involved:

Most press cases can run without me having to get involved. But if it's important enough, if it's on the minister's mind or if someone's starting to shoot at the ministry or whatever (...) Well, then I am, then I have to get into it. Then I have to spend time on it: What's what? What should we think about it? How should we deal with it? And how should we act? (PS 15).

In the quote above, Permanent Secretary 15 explains the types of questions considered for discussion with the minister. As mentioned earlier, it differs whether a media appearance is planned or expected, but there are often stories in the news that the minister is expected to respond to. The contemporary media wants answers very fast, meaning that the normal procedures are sometimes invalidated because they are too slow. If the ministry or minister is criticized, the permanent secretary will usually be involved in the handling. When the ministry is criticized, the permanent secretary plays an important part in protecting the ministry's reputation. When such critique is focused on the minister, the normal servicing of the minister applies. Thus, the permanent secretary can, to varying degrees, be involved in replying to such criticism;

that is, getting back with an investigation of the problem or a solution to it (e.g., new procedures).

It appears as though some permanent secretaries are mainly focused on the content of the minister's answers to the press. This is also the impression given by Permanent Secretary 9, who is concerned with avoiding that the minister ends up on thin ice:

And then there's the whole press section as well, which is always a little harder to handle. Most of it we also try to get into our case management systems, but sometimes it goes so fast. And then it's important for me that the minister must not get out on thin ice. She mustn't say anything that can get her in trouble in any way. It's probably mostly the political context and whatever else is going on – in other ministries, in negotiations and what is being said, etc. – which I contribute to at my level. To make sure that everything is as it should be (PS 9).

Besides advising the minister on the content of specific cases, the permanent secretary remains informed about the media in general. According to the permanent secretary, this enables her to provide better advice regarding the minister's media appearances. Notably, Permanent Secretary 10 also argues that this makes it possible to advise the minister on their relationship to- and mandate within the government. Counsel regarding communication is, thus, often very intertwined with the other types of advice provided by the permanent secretary:

Well, they take up a lot of time in the sense that I follow them very closely, because I think it's my duty when I am to advise the minister. The minister also follows the media very closely and I'm such a nerd, so I read all the newspapers in the evening before going to bed and know what's on the next morning. And I ask the press unit to keep me closely informed about who the minister has talked to, when etc. So I play a role in advising the minister on what to say in the press, and for instance, tell the minister, 'That's too far. You're going too far now. You're going to have problems with the government with this, you know?' (PS 10).

Knowing about the communication outwardly can also be a way for a permanent secretary to keep their finger on the pulse of what is going on as well as ensuring that they are conveying the right message.

I basically approve everything: all of the contingencies, the press releases, etc. It's only if it goes very fast, then I don't always get to it. But they sit right outside my door, so it's easy just to come in and get an 'OK'. But I don't get into the details – just the judgment. I just need to know what's going on (PS 9)

For more on the handling of the media, see Chapter 16.

7.5 The minister's expectations

POLITICAL-TACTICAL ADVICE. The ministers seem to share very similar ideas regarding the counsel they should receive from their permanent secretary, namely that they must provide *fachwissen* and political-tactical considerations, but not advice on party politics. As Minister 1 explains:

The permanent secretaries must know the professional, technical and they must have a large capacity for work. But they also have to know the politics. Not the party politics, but be able to play the political game. Understand where and what kind of problems you will run into and the possibilities if you make different decisions and choose different solutions (M 1).

Most ministers place emphasis on the importance of the political-tactical advice they receive from their permanent secretary. This includes helping them to pick the right tool from of the political-tactical toolbox, such as discussing different ways to find a majority in the Folketing, which stakeholders will support a given suggestion and who will not support it, and so on. In the words of Minister 6:

The permanent secretary must advise the minister: How can we achieve the goals you set? What room for manoeuvre is there? That is, both politically: is it plausible that you can find a majority for it? If you can't find a majority for it, then what can we do? Can you make a change to an executive order? Can you send out a 'pastoral letter'? Can you do something else that doesn't require new legislation? So – guiding in the political tools available. 'What you're asking about there – what does it cost? How are different stakeholders expected to react? If you do that, then you will have this and that organization against you, whereas these guys might think it's good'. That is, the thing about also knowing the landscape. So it's all about advising the minister: How can we actually get your 'political ship' out to sea? In the best way? (M 6).

One of the matters that is often discussed is whether the permanent secretaries can deliver such political-tactical advice to various government constellations. While this is not something I explicitly investigated in my interviews (and something that may also vary considerably), I think this quote from an interview with a minister deserves mention:

My permanent secretary is definitely one of the more political and advises me in relation to: 'If you have to get this through, you have to keep in mind that Venstre means this and that, and SF means this and that – and then maybe try to make a compromise there and there'. So it's actually a very political role, despite the fact that he is apolitical in nature and has worked for previous governments and future governments as well. Even though we don't have the same party-political affiliation, it's still a position where you, as permanent secretary, stand in the minister's shoes and provide counsel – also politically (M 9).

The minister pinpoints the permanent secretaries' balancing act of providing political-tactical advice while remaining apolitical. This specific minister does not seem to find this problematic, however, as long as the permanent secretary is able to put herself in the minister's place. The minister thus seems satisfied with the political-tactical advice provided by the permanent secretary. However, this theme seems to divide the ministers, some ministers also expressing a need for more political-tactical advice. Some even found that the counsel on the political-tactical aspect was lacking.

All of the political considerations – I can read that from the case – no one has considered them... I just have to go back, read, and say, 'Well, what do the Swedes and Norwegians say? Has the Venstre spokesperson made a statement? Does SF have a spokesperson? Has the Social Liberal spokesperson commented on this in the press?' That's not part of the case. And I would guess it has slipped all the way up the system and been approved without anyone considering it, because what they're sitting and looking at the [legal and professional stuff, AT]. But that's only part of the basis for making decisions. Like, this also has to be communicated in a way (...) What should we do? I don't think it has been thought through properly, and I think it rests on very few shoulders to think about it (M 8).

Thus, the minister does not seem to expect the permanent secretary to provide party-political advice. Again, the definition of this is relatively broad. The ministers are also clear about expecting political-tactical advice from their respective permanent secretaries, and their definitions of this process are very similar to those of the permanent secretaries. However, the ministers are divided with respect to whether they actually get the political-tactical advice they need. Some seem content with the counsel they get, while others call for more political-tactical advice from the permanent secretary in their everyday life.

FACHWISSEN ADVICE. The ministers in general expect their permanent secretary to discuss the professional-technical parts of different policy dossiers, written notes etc. with them. There seems to be considerable overlap in the approaches of ministers and permanent secretaries to the counsel on *fachwissen*.

Then there's the permanent secretary's job – the substantive discussion of cases. In other words, it's a pressure test of proposals, answers to questions from the Folketing, solutions to the cases that come up and so on. It's the permanent secretary's job – and my interaction with the permanent secretary – to discuss the technical possibilities available to solve a problem (M 4).

The minister is thus emphasizing the professional back-and-forth on the contents of the written notes, policy dossiers etc. as crucial in the minister–permanent secretary interplay. Minister 4 mentions that the permanent secretary should ensure that the content of the answers to Folketing questions is correct, to help come up with solutions to specific problem etc.

Concurrently, Minister 6 argues that the permanent secretary should give an account of the ministry’s knowledge on the specific issue, to pinpoint potential side effects of initiatives, and to advise on the foundation for the policy initiatives:

And then do it in a way that’s in accordance with the law and the principles that apply to the civil service. And the latter is also really important. That there are also some dynamics in the arm’s length principles, fulfilling civil servant’s obligations, respect for science. That is, that you advise the minister: ‘Is there evidence to do what you’re doing there? What do we know about it? If you do, what side effects can it have?’ They can be economic and so on. So it’s a really diverse job (M 6).

The minister is also very concerned that the counsel should originate in the norms of the behaviour of civil servants (such as Code VII). Following this, Minister 3 stresses how the permanent secretary should challenge the minister’s point of view in their discussions. That is, the permanent secretary should also make the minister aware of arguments that are not in line with the minister’s initial ideas or line of thinking:

When I say that there’s something I want politically, then the permanent secretary can and must challenge me on it. But the permanent secretary must also help me with how to achieve my political goals, while at the same time drawing attention to the challenges and what achieving them will cost. But it’s important to me that it’s ultimately a political trade-off and decision whether I continue to want to pursue my original idea (M 3).

The minister argues that the permanent secretary should help to attain their political goals, among other things by making them aware of the potential pitfalls and what moving forward will cost. This is very similar to some of the points made by the permanent secretaries about being very open about the consequences of making different political decisions. At the end of the day, the minister stresses that it is their own decision whether or not to proceed with a suggestion.

LEGAL ADVICE. Based on my observations and interview material, the ministers also seem to be very aware of legal questions. While some ministers have a legal background, most must rely on legal counsel from the civil service. This legal expertise is often enhanced as a crucial aspect of providing counsel to the

minister; for instance, Minister 3 mentions how the permanent secretary should ensure that the minister has the legal authority to make a given decision:

The permanent secretary has three important responsibilities: to be my sparring partner, to run the ministry, and to ensure that there is basis in the law. It requires a large capacity (M 3).

There seems to be general satisfaction with the legal counsel provided to the ministers. The ministers appear to take for granted that the civil service provides competent legal counsel, concurrently with the ministers being very aware of the importance of advice on legal aspects of their job. As Minister 5 shares:

I'm incredibly grateful that the permanent secretary has a really sharp legal eye and ensures that we're managing properly and that we're complying with the law (M 8).

Thus, the ministers do expect legal counsel, but generally seem content with the advice they receive on this. That does not mean they do not ask questions and double check if the permanent civil service has checked the legal questions; rather, they generally trust the advice they receive.

COUNSEL ON COMMUNICATION. The ministers also believe that permanent secretaries must consider communication to some degree. The ministers vary in terms of how important this is to them. As Minister 5 says, however, the permanent secretary must also think about communication. This includes considering if there are positive stories that can promote the minister, preparing the minister to comment on different issues in the media, thinking about how the minister can handle messy cases etc.:

And then there are also considerations regarding communication, which is a 'third leg'. Sometimes I think they have it. The permanent secretary, to me, is just the top of a multi-tiered cake. Sometimes good considerations have been made about – 'So, is that a rotten case? Do we need to think about how it is to be presented? Am I prepared to comment? Is there anything good I can say? An advantage for the political assessment?' I think the quality of the considerations that have been made before I see the case have fluctuated (M 5).

Minister 5 believes the degree of counsel on communication varies in the policy dossiers and written policy notes the minister receives. However, the satisfaction with the permanent secretaries' counsel in relation to communication varies from minister to minister. It also seems as though there is a distinct difference in how important it this is to the minister, which may be connected with the various types of special advisors, type of ministry etc.

Nevertheless, the ministers seem to expect that their permanent secretary keeps themselves informed regarding the news in the media, including social media; and that the permanent secretary has the minister and their agenda in mind:

The stakeholders around the political environment and the political discussions, they're basically the same [for the permanent secretary and minister, AT]. I expect a modern permanent secretary to orient themselves in the media, orient themselves on social media, orient themselves towards the stakeholders, and think about the minister and the minister's opportunities to work out their agenda when orienting themselves. And that's my primary point – that there has been a clear shift with modern permanent secretaries (M 4).

Thus, the minister generally expects the permanent secretary to be aware of anything that is of concern to the minister.

7.6 Conclusion

I found that the permanent secretaries distinguish between four types of counsel: advice on party politics, political-tactical advice, *fachwissen* advice, and advice on communication. The permanent secretary is not supposed to provide advice on party politics. Instead, the minister can obtain this type of advice from their special advisor. The permanent secretary provides the other three types of counsel, even though the advice required inevitably varies from ministry to ministry and from minister to minister.

The permanent secretaries and ministers seem to agree on the different types of counsel that can be provided to the minister. There also seems to be considerable overlap between how they perceive the content of this counsel within the four advice categories. However, where the permanent secretaries emphasize the importance of providing political-tactical advice, the group of ministers are divided in terms of whether the political-tactical advice is satisfactory. Some ministers indicate satisfaction with the professional exchange with their permanent secretary when it comes to political-tactical advice, whereas a few ministers find this to be lacking. They do not think the written material presents this to a sufficient degree, and they find themselves and their special advisor alone with this part of the job. In general, the ministers seem satisfied with the *fachwissen* advice and legal counsel provided by their permanent secretary.

You may find that some of the paragraphs above come across as somewhat equivocal, especially the sections on party-political advice and political-tactical advice in contrast to the neutral position inherent in being part of the permanent civil service. Delivering political-tactical advice without leaning into the party-political advice can be quite a balancing act. Thus, finding a middle

way that endangers neither their own nor their minister's position is crucial. In general, they expressed that the line was quite clear to them in practice.

Chapter 8. Meetings

Not surprisingly, permanent secretaries participate in many meetings, both in-house (within the ministry) and with external actors. In this chapter, I elaborate on the tasks and role of permanent secretaries *before, during* and *after* meetings. The chapter distinguishes between the differences that I encountered in my fieldwork and in interviews regarding the types of meetings. In-house meetings are with persons such as the minister, the group management, division heads, heads of units and rank-and-file civil servants. External meetings are with actors such as political spokespersons, interest organizations and sector representatives. Some aspects of the meetings seemed to differ, depending on whether external actors participated or if they were internal participants only.

8.1 Before meetings

THE PERMANENT SECRETARY PREPARES. The permanent secretary often approves the material being prepared for the specific meeting in question. The case handling process is described in detail in Chapter 13. In this chapter, I focus on another part of the preparation: the preparation of the professional/technical (*faglige*) aspects of the issue to be discussed.

If the meeting concerns a specific issue, the permanent secretary has probably already read and handled the issue in the past, when the material was prepared for the minister. However, the permanent secretary might still need to ensure that the material has not changed or merely to brush up on the conclusions. This is illustrated in excerpt 8.1 below, where the permanent secretary enquires about the model of analysis used to produce the material before participating in the negotiations as the minister's right hand.

Excerpt 8.1. The permanent secretary's professionalism

The permanent secretary comes out to the front office with the papers for the impending negotiations. 'If I have to be completely sharp on the technical side, then I have to be absolutely sure whether Model D is the basis', the permanent secretary says. The permanent secretary's personal secretary says that model D has been confirmed as the basis. The permanent secretary returns to his office and continues to read about the case.

Countless different issues are processed every day; hence, a slightly more comprehensive brush up than the one referred to in the excerpt above can become necessary. One or more civil servants is then typically called to the permanent secretary's office so that the latter can pick the brains of the former on the issue. This is the case in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 8.2. I just have to understand it correctly ...

The permanent secretary has summoned a civil servant to a meeting on a specific case. The permanent secretary explains that the civil servant must help him 'knock off some rust', and then asks several questions about the case before finally noticing that he has previously received an explanation for it, but simply could not remember – and that if he was a minister, then he would think such and such. Finally, he asks what law the case is related to. The civil servant refers to the law and answers the permanent secretary's questions one by one.

Here, the permanent secretary makes use of the fact that the lower-ranking civil servants spend more time on the individual cases and know more than is presented in the material. Depending on the issue, this could take a few minutes or as much as 15–30 minutes if there are many questions or if the permanent secretary is not satisfied with their answers or the meeting material for whatever reason. This is typically if they were too technical, too far away from what the minister requested, if the implications were unclear, or if the permanent secretary found information to be missing.

While the permanent secretaries often spend time updating their *fachwissen* prior to meetings with the minister, their preparations for such meetings differ substantially. While they are sometimes very prepared, I also observed instances where they took little time to prepare or even read the agenda just minutes before the meeting. There could be many different reasons why this could be the case, but the common denominator was that something more important came up. The permanent secretaries were therefore very dependent on their collaboration with the front office and that one of the secretaries would give a heads up if the permanent secretary had to prepare something. See excerpt 8.3 below for an example of this:

Excerpt 8.3. Chairing meetings

The permanent secretary says that, as permanent secretary, it is important to be able to hand control over to others – especially in relation to the calendar. The permanent trust that the front office will give a heads up if something must be prepared for a meeting, where the permanent secretary is chairing the meeting. It also means that the permanent secretary must be able to chair a meeting with very little preparation. The permanent secretary sometimes has little or no time to prepare for a meeting, and having a mere two minutes to prepare is often really good. ‘But that’s just how it goes’, the permanent secretary says – before moving on to the next meeting.

Hence, the permanent secretary must be able to chair the meeting with little or no preparation. While they have usually encountered the issue of the meeting beforehand, quickly adapting to and comprehending material that at times can be rather complex and technical requires a lot of the permanent secretary.

ENSURE THE MINISTER IS PREPARED. Before meetings begin, the permanent secretary is involved in preparing the minister, either in the preparation of meeting material, in pre-meetings with the minister or simply a text/call before a meeting with a reminder to ‘please note that...’. The permanent secretary’s involvement in such matters also depends on the minister’s experience: Experienced ministers tend to require less preparation from the civil service than do less experienced ministers.

I need to make sure that the minister is prepared and ready to attend the meeting. It may not take too much, because the ministers for whom I’ve been permanent secretary have been good at that kind of thing (PS 16).

How much the permanent secretary must help with the minister’s preparation before various meetings varies. It is usually only in connection with meetings with external actors, such as negotiations or meetings with political spokespersons. Excerpt 8.4 below illustrates how one of a permanent secretary’s important functions is also to prepare their minister for the process and to assure the minister that everything is under control:

Excerpt 8.4. Preparing for negotiations

The permanent secretary and minister discuss negotiations scheduled for later that day, which will take place together with another minister. A secretary says the other minister will make some brief introductory remarks and then pass the presentation on to the minister. The minister looks a little confused and looks questioningly at the permanent secretary, who reassures that this was to be expected. 'But are we ready for that?', the minister asks. The permanent secretary argues that they prepared and ready.

However, it is not only brief, reassuring remarks in the hallway; more formal meetings are also held to prepare the minister for the negotiations. Excerpt 8.5 below is an example of one such meeting held to prepare a minister for a meeting with political spokespersons. Here, the minister can pose questions to the permanent secretary and other civil servants. In this instance, the special advisor also participates, but that is not a given.

Excerpt 8.5. Preparation for meeting with external stakeholders

The permanent secretary arrives late for the meeting with the minister, as he had been at another meeting. There is an open seat to one side of the minister, intended for the permanent secretary, so he sits there and flips through the papers in front of him, as if to figure out what point on the agenda the other participants discuss. During the 15-minute meeting, it is primarily the minister who is asking a series of questions, which the civil servants then answer. However, the special advisor also poses questions once in a while. On one side of the meeting table, there are officials with lots of papers in front of them, who note the minister's questions and wishes. The permanent secretary answers some of the questions, but many questions are taken care of by the other officials. On one occasion, the permanent secretary himself asks the civil servants something; otherwise, he answers the minister's questions. If he does not know the answer, he glances down the chain of officials. After 15 minutes, the permanent secretary suggests that the remaining points of the meeting be discussed in a smaller circle, after which the officials on one side of the meeting table get up and leave the room. The special advisor moves closer to the minister, after which the meeting continues for another quarter of an hour.

As mentioned earlier, on top of preparing the minister for such meetings, the permanent secretary also helps prepare the materials for meetings. This ranges from the wording of policy initiatives to the power point shows for presentation by the minister:

But it's also about loyally working for, if the minister wants to reform something, for example – Well, then you have to come up with a proposal for it (PS 14).

Hence, there are different parts of preparing the minister, and while the preparation of the meeting material seems to be a similar workload for the permanent secretary irrespective of the minister, the pre-meeting talks with the minister about how the meeting should be handled vary depending on the minister's experience, the case and type of meeting.

8.2 During meetings

SEATING PRACTICES. Early in my fieldwork, I often asked if there were assigned seats when participating in a meeting. I was usually told no. While there might not be formally assigned seats (understood as people sitting in the same seat at every meeting), there were some very firm practices – I encountered one of these practices when I broke practice, as shown in the excerpt 8.6 below.

Excerpt 8.6. Violating the informal norms

The permanent secretary and I were among the last to enter the meeting room, and there were only a few seats available around the table. I recognized most of the political spokespersons from the other parties and of course the minister and civil servants from the ministry in question. Right next to the minister, there were an available seat – saved for the permanent secretary. I found an available seat across from the permanent secretary and a few seats down from the political spokespersons. The meeting started. I could sense something was wrong but had no idea what.

After the meeting, I asked one of the civil servants attending the meeting if I had done something wrong. She smiled and explained that I had placed myself on the wrong side of the table, but that it was okay because I was new. She elaborated that because I am a part of the minister's entourage (my words), I should be sitting on the minister's side of the table, instead of next to the political spokespersons who were participating in the minister's meeting.

At the next meeting, the minister's secretary graciously helped me to find a seat on the minister's side of the table.

Thus, the first rule of thumb is that, if there are 'guests', the minister and her civil servants sit on the same side of the table. Even if this means that the minister's secretary has to scribble notes on their iPad on their lap despite there being vacant seats on the 'guest side' of the table. No one said to do so; they just moved the chair to place it in further of the row of chairs. Second, the permanent secretary usually sits seat next to the minister. While exceptions may occur, this seemed to be the main practice when participating in meetings

with the minister. Third, after a while I realized that the participants from the ministry would usually spread out according to their rank in the hierarchy. Of course, the meeting participants differed and there would not be vacant seats unless someone was expected to come but were running late (which happened quite often). For instance, if there was no head of division, the head of unit would move up one chair. Figure 8.1 is an example of how the possible seating at internal meetings. Usually, the permanent secretary and special advisor are seated immediately beside or close to the minister. Sometimes, one of the heads of division would sit between the minister and special advisor, depending on the subject. The rest would be seated around the table, usually with the administrative officers and the minister's secretary furthest away from the minister, the latter usually on the minister's side of the table.

Figure 8.1. Seating practice, internal meeting

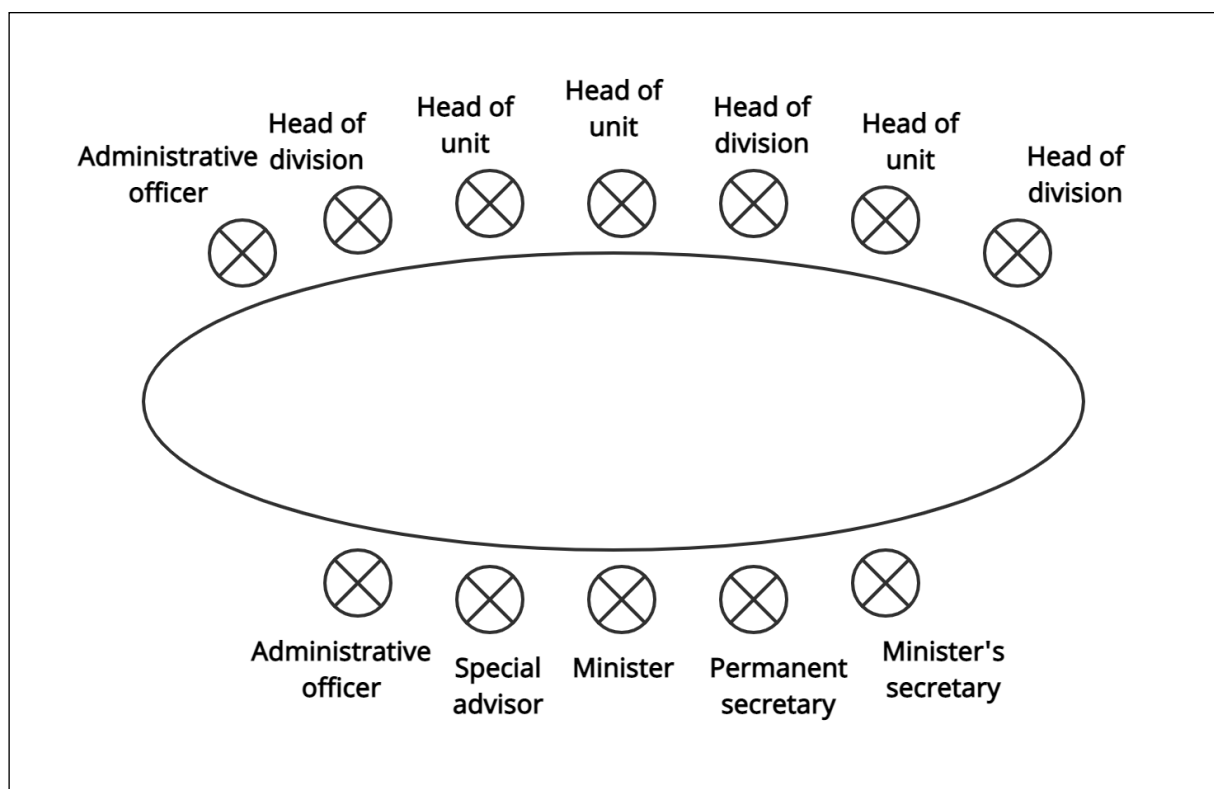
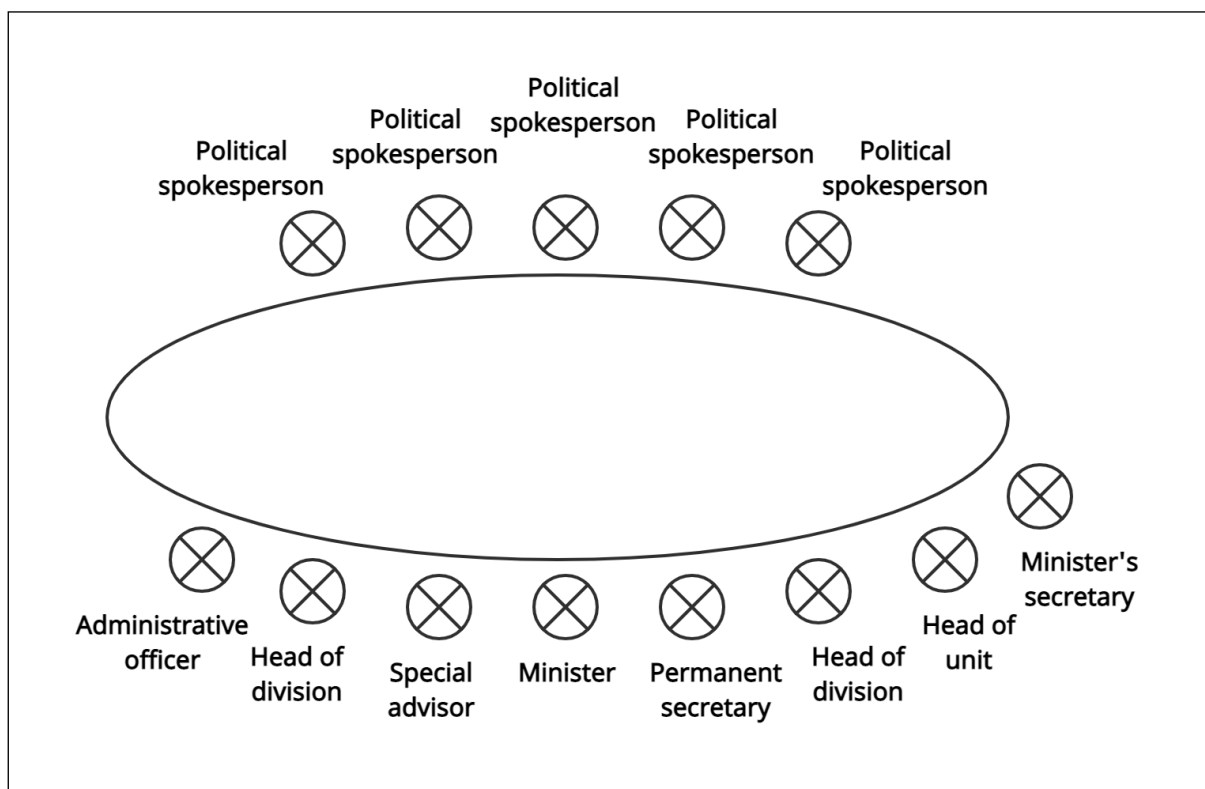


Figure 8.2 below illustrates the seating practice in a meeting with external participants. Here, the civil servants from the ministry will always sit on the minister's side of the table. The permanent secretary and special advisor will often sit next to the minister – depending on the meeting, the special advisor may not participate or will be moved down one seat and replaced by a head of division. Note how the hierarchy is reflected in the seating practice.

Figure 8.2. Seating practice, meeting with external participants



MASTER OF CEREMONIES. Outsiders might be unaware of such informal rules or of the practices in the specific ministries. The permanent secretary therefore also has a role as the ‘master of ceremonies’. He will be responsible for explaining to guests where they are expected to sit, to ask someone to pull the curtains if the sun is annoying (or possibly doing it himself), and the one to set the tone regarding whether to shake hands, do an elbow bump or wave (the latter two points relevant during the COVID-19 pandemic). While the permanent secretaries’ personality differed – some were very outgoing, some more reserved by nature – they also ensured the guests were aware if they were participating in a meeting on a special occasion, such as the minister’s birthday. Excerpt 8.7 below illustrates an instance where the permanent secretary ensures the representatives from an interest organization take the seats designated to them across from the minister.

Excerpt 8.7. Master of Ceremonies

There is a meet-and-greet in the minister's office involving the minister, the permanent secretary and the minister's secretary. The minister and permanent secretary greet the guests as they arrive and show them to the meeting room. The guests are about to sit with their backs to the windows, which is the side on which the minister usually sits when receiving guests. 'You have to sit over here' says the permanent secretary, and guides them over to the 'right' side of the table with a smile. 'Otherwise we'll be completely confused'.

Note: There are no quotes in the excerpts from fieldwork. I have paraphrased it based on my jottings.

This role was most pronounced during meetings with external actors from the sector, interest organizations etc. The political spokespersons would usually be aware of the seating practices from past meetings. I even encountered one political spokesperson who arrived very early for a meeting to get the best position at the table directly across from the minister. The minister also usually knew the other politicians quite well; hence, there is less need for a ceremonial master at such meetings.

EXPECTATIONS DURING THE MEETING. The role of the permanent secretary at meetings differs, depending on, among other things, who is chairing the meeting. When the minister chairs a meeting, the permanent secretary is more passive than when the permanent secretary has the role as chair. Nevertheless, the respective preferences and personalities of minister and permanent secretary are central to how they act at meetings, which I elaborate on in the following.

There are many different ways to be permanent secretary and many interviewees talk about different 'schools'; that is, different ways of thinking about and carrying out the job. Several mention how the hierarchy used to be more pronounced but that the 'new school' is less strict about the hierarchy. This becomes visible in meetings, where the permanent secretaries belonging to the 'old school' might enforce the hierarchy more than those closer to the 'new school'. The following quote from one head of division explains this rather well:

I've experienced different schools of thought. I've participated in ministerial meetings since I was a young civil servant and I have had various positions. Hence, I've also seen other dynamics between division heads and permanent secretaries. And I believe there has probably also been a bit of a modernization. I remember when I started as a very young clerk in [specific] ministry, it was very

hierarchical. The permanent secretary did most of the talking, and the permanent secretary was expected to be able to present the entire case in full. Others spoke if asked. I think the division head might have had a slightly greater opportunity to speak up and take the floor on his own initiative. Other than that, it was only if you were looked at or asked. And there, I think there has been a bit of a softening. And again, it depends a lot on personalities and that kind of thing. In any case, I feel that I have an understanding with the permanent secretary that sometimes she starts, and at times I start. It spreads informally in the room – what’s assessed to be best. And I feel that I have quite a wide range in terms of chiming in and expressing my opinion along the way. I don’t feel as though I merely have a right to it – I actually also feel an obligation to do so (HoD 4).

The meeting practices differ slightly from ministry to ministry. While the different styles and personalities of ministers and permanent secretaries (and not least the combination) influence the meetings, there are also a number of common features, which will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

THE TURNING-HEAD PRACTICE. During meetings, I also encountered the ‘turning-head practice’. This entails that if the minister is in doubt about something or wants an opinion from the civil service, they look deliberately at the permanent secretary, thereby silently passing on the word. The permanent secretary might now answer the question; but if in doubt, they might pass on the baton by looking at the head of division. The head of division might now answer or look to the head of unit; and so it continued until the lowest-ranking civil servant had (hopefully) answered the question.

It varies considerably how much the permanent civil servants offer their opinions or advice without the minister inviting them to speak. This depends on the minister’s personal preferences and will often vary over time. Several interviewees mention that the minister often wants to demonstrate their knowledge and take control earlier in their period as minister. But as their trust in the civil service grows and they have proven themselves as ministers, they might relax a bit more. This also differs in relation to the forum; some ministers draw a line when it comes to political forums, such as Folketing hearings and government committee meetings. It is custom that only the minister speaks at parliamentary hearings, and some ministers have even asked the civil servants not to participate in these meetings, according to the interviewees. In the government committee meetings, the minister does the talking unless there are specific *fachwissen* questions. The minister might then ask the permanent secretary to help with technical details. On very rare occasions, the permanent secretary can act as stand-in for the minister in government committee meetings.

PROVIDE *FACHWISSEN*. Another important task for the permanent secretaries is to provide *fachwissen*, including technical, organizational and practical considerations to the discussion. The permanent secretary provides such counsel if asked directly about something.

It is obviously also to be able to answer things if they have something on their mind. And it's not as though I can answer everything – but then there are often others who can answer (PS 9).

And if nobody can answer the questions during the meeting, someone will ensure that the issue is scrutinized and provide an answer:

There will typically also be questions of a factual nature that the civil service can clarify on the spot. If the civil service can't clarify it immediately, we promise the political spokespersons to write a note on it (PS 4).

This statement is supported by fieldnotes. In excerpt 8.8 below, the permanent secretary answers a question from a political spokesperson. But after providing an answer, he confers with the head of division while the meeting continues, and they end up concluding they will look into it again.

Excerpt 8.8. Meeting with spokespersons

There is a meeting with the political spokespersons in the minister's remit, and the minister has reached one of the last agenda items. One of the spokespersons asks if the minister has any more detailed figures about the group they are talking about. The minister looks at the permanent secretary and asks him the same question. The permanent secretary replies that, unfortunately, it is a group that they know next to nothing about and elaborates on this. When the minister takes over the conversation with the spokespersons, the permanent secretary leans back and speaks in a low voice with a head of division behind the minister's back (literally). The permanent secretary leans back over the table and says that they will just double-check if there are any figures for that group. The minister concurs and continues with the next question from the spokesperson.

However, the permanent secretary will also help the minister during the meeting, passing small notes with useful information of all kinds. This can include facts, underlining things in the paper in front of the minister or whispering something to the minister.

The permanent secretary also gives input to the discussion by supplementing with professional, technical assistance, advice and potential solutions:

There will be a combination of that, if it gets a little more tense, if it is an important, political meeting where some things must be clarified, then the function is, together with the division head, to be able to provide professional

input to the political discussion and to ensure that they have a discussion on an informed basis. And where you can say something like: ‘What you’re saying here – we can investigate, but it can be difficult for this and that reason. Or could one alternatively consider this model because it can be done?’ (PS 14).

They do this to ensure that the politicians engage in debate on an informed basis. Hence, the permanent secretaries are both pointing to difficulties and potential solutions or ways to bypass these difficulties.

This professional, technical knowledge is also something the ministers expect of the permanent secretary:

Well, I also expect the permanent secretary to participate in the negotiations so that I, as minister, have professional support to rely on (M 4).

Still, the ministers also recognize that even the knowledge of the permanent secretaries can fall short:

The permanent secretary is the system’s #1 man. He knows pretty much everything. Although obviously things can get so detailed that the permanent secretary doesn’t know it (M 6).

The ministers emphasize how the permanent secretary’s role differs depending on the type of meeting. If it is an internal meeting, either within the ministry or government, the minister expects the permanent secretary to express their opinion frankly, even if the minister might be of a different opinion. The minister expects to have their views challenged:

It also depends a bit on the situation. But if they are meetings within the government, then I expect the permanent secretary to participate completely on equal terms with me. To speak their mind, even if we do not necessarily agree (M 1).

Conversely, in meetings with external actors (e.g., political spokespersons, interest organizations), the minister expects the permanent secretary’s support and to help to achieve the minister’s purpose with the meeting. Hence, the permanent secretary should act as a loyal supporter of the minister and provide unconditional support:

If it’s a meeting with external parties or political parties and so on, then I expect the permanent secretary to back me up unconditionally. Also, if the permanent secretary can sense that things are going off track – that they speak up and help me. That also depends on the situation (M 1).

As with everything else, the degree to which the permanent secretary should begin to speaking to assist the minister depends on the situation. This requires *fingerspitzengefühl*.

AN EXTRA SET OF EYES AND EARS. Permanent secretaries are not only the minister's right-hand man, they are also an extra set of eyes and ears when the minister is hosting a meeting. This becomes especially important in meetings involving external stakeholders, whether they be interest organizations, other ministers or political spokespersons. Hence, one very important function is simply to listen carefully:

When it comes to the minister's meetings, the minister does the talking. I join just because I have to hear what's going on (PS 9).

Several permanent secretaries highlight this aspect: listening and taking notes (some take mental notes, others actually write down notes) of what is being said at a meeting:

I also think that my job is to be able to sit back next to the minister, observe and make note of what is said (PS 16).

However, it is not only about hearing the words and making (mental) note of what is said; it is also about sensing the atmosphere in the room. Much is usually expressed in this manner and left unspoken. For instance, how does Political Spokesperson A react, when Spokesperson B says something? Do they nod, gently shake their head, or where they busy looking at their phone?

I attend all of the minister's important meetings. It's important to be able to help. So you can sense the mood and hear what they are saying. Capture some signals and attend meetings with stakeholders and supplement and ask about some things or answer if there is anything. You're a team. If it works well, then you really are a team (PS 8).

On top of this, the permanent secretary has several discreet ways of assisting the minister in meetings. By underlining something on a page, then strategically placing a pen so it points to the underlining, gently pushing the paper towards the minister. To write cues in capitals in the corner of the cover of the case. Whispering something to the minister when someone else is speaking. By strategically asking questions they know would be of interest to the minister. Sensing the room is thus important, because the permanent secretary can provide inputs during the meeting and thereby help the minister navigate.

Excerpt 8.9 is an example of a meeting with an external actor. Here, the permanent secretary is quite passive, asking only a few questions during the meetings. Most of the time, the permanent secretary just listens and observes. Immediately after the meeting, the permanent secretary evaluates the meeting and takes action on how to incorporate the knowledge gleaned from the meeting in the ministry's work moving forward.

Excerpt 8.9. Meeting with external actors

The permanent secretary enters the minister's office, joining the minister and an agency head. The minister's guest now arrives, greets the others and sits down opposite to the minister. The minister and the guest do most of the talking, the permanent secretary asks only a few questions. Throughout most of the meeting, the permanent secretary is sitting back in their chair and not writing very many notes. After half an hour, the meeting is over and the guest leaves. The others spend a couple of minutes evaluating the meeting and agree on what should happen next. The agency head must follow up. As the agency head and permanent secretary leave the room together, they enter the permanent secretary's office and talk for another five minutes.

The permanent secretary can also ask follow up questions or ask someone to elaborate. In general, their presence at the meeting is important when the permanent secretary must follow up on the agenda after the meeting, so the minister does not have to give a summary of the meeting.

Part of my function in negotiations is simply being there. By being there and listening to what the different parties say, I have a basis to help push the matter forward and find out what the next move could be like without the minister having to retell everything (PS 4).

Hence, the permanent secretary (and other top civil servants) participating in the minister's meetings is also a way to ensure that the further process is in line with the conclusions at the meeting and allows continued discussion of the meeting with the minister:

So it's a little easier afterwards to discuss. And to assess it afterwards: Did we get the same thing out of the meeting? Did we expect the criticism? (PS 14).

The ministers also appreciate having an extra set of eyes and ears to read the room and for ideas about how to reach an agreement. Diplomatic skill is especially appreciated:

And permanent secretaries are good at manoeuvring between people. They're good at reading people, because there's a lot of diplomacy in being a permanent secretary. To work out what kind of dynamics there are between politicians and the various parties. What kind of room for manoeuvre are we looking at here? (M 6).

As mentioned in Chapter 7, the permanent secretaries are often quite familiar with the positions held by the various political spokespersons, as they have usually participated in negotiations with them in the past. They have seen this political game unfold many times previously while rising through the ranks of

the ministry, and this experience has usually provided them with an acute sense of how to carry out negotiations. This stands them in good stead when providing counsel to their minister regarding potential solutions and pitfalls.

MEETINGS WITH EXTERNAL ACTORS. Even though the permanent secretaries represent the ministry, and thereby the professional and technical expertise, they are aware of how they cannot act against the current minister's will. Hence, they are always somehow representing the current minister. This can be very specific, as the stand-in for the minister, as in excerpt 8.10 below. Here, the permanent secretary is giving a talk that the minister was supposed to give. The permanent secretary is thus aware of not presenting solutions to the sector that the minister would dislike. Hence, the permanent secretary must be loyal to the minister, even when representing the ministry in general.

Excerpt 8.10. Stand-in for the minister

The permanent secretary sits down in front of the desk. He says that he is preparing speech points for the presentation at the annual meeting of an interest organization within the ministry's remit. But the message that the permanent secretary should bring is difficult. The minister actually should have participated but is prevented from attending, so the permanent secretary has promised the organizer to come instead, the permanent secretary explains, and elaborates on the dilemma in relation to the message: the obvious professional/technical solution is not in the spirit of the minister's party.

Another example is excerpt 8.11, where the permanent secretary is chairing a regular meeting with external stakeholders. The external stakeholders want to feature the minister in their membership magazine. The permanent secretary says that they can probably arrange for that to happen. After the meeting with the representatives, the permanent secretary discusses the situation with the head of division, who agrees to talk to the special advisor and ask them to write something. The permanent secretary notes that while they might not be the minister's core voters, the minister should probably do it anyway.

Excerpt 8.11. Representing the minister

There has been a meeting with an external organization. The permanent secretary concludes the meeting by asking if they have anything else they want to discuss while stacking his papers. Only if the minister might want to appear in the membership magazine on an optional topic, the stakeholder suggests. The permanent secretary asks about the deadline and is told that it is in a month. The permanent secretary asks again if it was a few pages on an optional topic and looks up from his papers, now lying in a pile in front of him. The stakeholder replies that they can easily come up with a topic but thought that the minister might have a topic that they would like to talk about. The permanent secretary thinks that it is likely possible and says that he will talk about it with the minister.

(...) After the stakeholders have left, the head of division asks if she should talk to the minister's special advisor about writing something. The permanent secretary thinks this is a good idea, and adds that even though the group may not be the minister's typical voters, it is still their minister. The head of division confirms the agreement and leaves the room.

This anecdote illustrates how the permanent secretaries also balance the minister's time commitments and their potential re-election, but also that the permanent secretary is concerned with the minister representing the ministry towards the sector.

The permanent secretary is also representing the ministry as an institution in meetings with external actors. The permanent secretary's presence signals the importance that they attribute to this meeting and that they want to communicate the points to the rest of the ministry:

It is both to send the signal that it isn't just the minister who is sitting there. And also that I think it's really important. And that I will bring the points to my organization (PS 9).

Hence, one reason is to signal the importance of the subject to the ministry. Another reason for participating is to be the face of the ministry and to safeguard the ministry's reputation. The permanent secretary is often the face of the ministry, and it signals legitimacy when they say somethings or back up the minister. The permanent secretary must work to ensure that they and the ministry in general have the trust of external stakeholders.

You can't survive as a permanent secretary if you're not the one defining the house to the political spokespersons. And that they also trust you. (...) it makes a huge difference when I speak up the spokespersons' meeting and say which way is up in the matter and so on and so forth [hits the table]. They're listening. And it gives a completely different impression, and I do it because, for me, it's

also significant that the ministry's credibility is at stake. And it has a different impact than if it was the minister [who said it, AT], where I just sat like that [the permanent secretary puts his hands on top of each other on the table] (PS 15).

It is important that the external stakeholders have confidence in the permanent secretary, as they represent the ministry. If there is little trust in the permanent secretary, the same will often hold true for the ministry. This also entails that the permanent secretary behaves carefully at meetings; while all attention are on the minister, an eye is also kept on the permanent secretary.

HEAD OF DIVISION – ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE. One or more division heads are often present at these meetings. When a head of division acts as stand-in for the permanent secretary at meetings, they describe their focus in the meeting as quite similar to that described by the permanent secretary above:

It's partly that I sit beside the minister and, now we have a relatively 'self-starting' minister. Again, that varies from minister to minister, but the focus is on: Does the minister need anything? Does the minister need any information? To pass a little note to them. Maybe the minister has moved somewhere where I kind of have to nudge them a little. Or maybe the minister just whispers and asks: 'Isn't this is how it is?' So that's the one focus: Does the minister need something from me? So either something that the minister themselves asks about or something that I think about – that maybe it would be nice for the minister to know this. Now they get a note about it (HoD 7).

The presence of the head of division also has multiple functions, the second part of which is to hear what is said and to sense the room, because they are a step closer to the drafting of the policy dossiers. As explained below, the head of division communicates the conclusions from the meeting to the civil servants drafting the dossier and checks the material before it reaches the permanent secretary. Presence in the meeting room allows the head of division to get the relevant information to do so.

The second focus is, of course, just as much about what happens in the room and to get all the important things written down. Because it's also my job to make things happen in afterwards. Once you've been in negotiations, you typically have to write up a lot of documents afterwards and there's a lot going on. We need to follow up on a whole. And I'm the one who goes back, finds the civil servants, the head of units who have to do it, and I make sure it happens. And I'm the one who grants approval when the material comes back again. So the focus is: What happened in the room? Who said what? What was actually said? What was the atmosphere in the room? It is enormously important that you can get your work done afterwards and make sure that it comes back [to the minister, AT]. It may also be necessary that I get hold of the division heads from other

ministries and say, ‘Now we’re moving in this direction’. ‘Now we’re right on the edge of our mandate’. Or, ‘Now we’re going to ask for a new mandate on this’. And that also requires that you’ve been present in the negotiations and that you know what’s going on. (HoD 7)

This also includes knowledge about the political mandate: Are they moving beyond the mandate? If yes, they need to secure a new political mandate. As these things are not necessarily written in stone after a meeting, it is very useful to be present at the meetings. This enables the head of division to get a sense of the participants, to hear their specific arguments and comments, and hence to get a better feeling of the political mandate.

The second part of the task as head of division seems to be valid both when serving as the alternate but also when the permanent secretary is present at meetings. The head of division is usually slightly closer to the daily goings-on in the ministry and has only a minor share of the permanent secretary’s portfolio. This enables them to clue in on their specific division, meaning that they have more in-depth knowledge about their specific sphere of responsibility than does the permanent secretary.

Nevertheless, the hierarchy remains visible in the meetings where both the head of division and permanent secretary participate. Excerpt 8.12 illustrates an example where the permanent secretary is not content with the answer provided by the head of division and interrupts the head of division to provide an answer himself in order to direct the answer in another direction:

Excerpt 8.12. The permanent secretary explains

There is a meeting prior to negotiations. The minister looks at the permanent secretary and head of division while asking why the time plan is at the same time as something else the ministry has planned. The head of division begins to answer, but is rather quickly interrupted by the minister, who again questioningly says that there is no good reason for it to be in January. The head of division starts to answer, but is interrupted relatively quickly by the permanent secretary, who chimes in and asks if it is not because it is the earliest time when the relevant data can be collected and ready for analysis?

8.3 After meetings

AFTER THE MEETING. Being present at a meeting is also important for the work to follow, and I will now pinpoint two tasks that benefit from the permanent secretary’s participation.

First, it ensures that the permanent secretary is able to engage in professional discussion with the minister after the meeting. To do so, it is important

to be familiar with the concerns of the representatives from the other political parties. This enables the permanent secretary to assist the minister in finding alternatives:

And then subsequently finding out where one can see a way through some of the things. So it's the advice – professional counsel – to say: 'Well, they were very worried about this. We could alternatively do that' (PS 14).

This entails planning how the minister can reach their objective and what the ministry can do to support the minister, ranging from the substantial part of the policy initiative to planning the negotiations:

But clearly – you're working for the minister and you also want to promote the political goals. Their aims. But it's about being a professional sparring partner in that context. Having to solve the cases. We solve a problem when we have a meeting. Then there's a problem. That's why a meeting is being held. We should be able to say afterwards, 'Well, what we did there, we agreed on a process that we would now try to write a paper to this political party about a process around the proposed legislation. How we could present it and how we subsequently deal with the concerns they had in the political group (PS 14).

Second, the permanent secretary must ensure that someone follows up on everything that is agreed to during the meeting:

So to be able to give precise orders or assignments back in the house about what to work on next (PS 14).

However, it is not only things related to the current meeting, but also things the minister says in relation to other current issues in the ministry. Due to their overview of current issues in the ministry, the permanent secretary might be able to pick up on things that other civil servants would not notice:

And maybe the minister says something at a meeting, maybe we have a meeting on a topic, and then the minister says something in the context of that meeting about something else that needs to happen. Then I need to pass it on. Thomas will often initiate something, but sometimes I would also like to make a comment on what the minister is thinking and what I think we should possibly be doing (PS 16).

As Permanent Secretary 16 also points out, however, it is not necessarily the permanent secretary who ensures that the conclusions from the meeting are handled in the ministry:

Of course, there are also many others from the ministry who help to ensure that we follow-up on the conclusions and that the work continues (PS 16).

Who follows up varies between ministries and types of meetings, but the minister's secretary or the permanent secretary's secretary will usually take notes and ensure that instructions are conveyed to the relevant actors.

Excerpt 8.13 is from a recurring meeting with the top civil servants in the ministry. The excerpt shows the second point on the agenda, where the permanent secretary briefs the others on how the negotiations are progressing. The permanent secretary communicates the positions of the different political parties and emphasizes the importance of close collaboration with the PMO and the Ministry of Finance as they move forward. This should ensure that when they reach an agreement with the other political parties, there should also be an all-clear within government.

Excerpt 8.13. Management meeting

There is a managers meeting between the permanent secretary, the division heads, the office manager in the ministerial & management secretariat, and the permanent secretary's secretary. The permanent secretary has the floor and gives a status of the various things in which the ministry is involved. (...)

The second item on the agenda is a status of some of the important government negotiations. Among other things, the permanent secretary provides a status of the positions of the other negotiating parties and their willingness in the negotiations; for example, how one of the opposition parties is trying to scuttle the negotiations. Next, the permanent secretary emphasizes the importance of remaining in close contact with both the Ministry of Finance and Prime Minister's Office at all times. There has been a tendency to forget the one ministry a bit, because they are thought to hold the same position as the other – but this is not necessarily the case. (...)

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shed light on the informal norms guiding meetings in the ministries. I have illustrated how the hierarchy becomes visible during the meetings, but also that there are differences between different types of ministers and, to some degree, permanent secretaries. Permanent secretaries attend to central tasks before, during *and* after meetings that are intended to best support the minister in reaching their objectives. This demands extensive knowledge about the professional and technical aspects of specific issues, but it also requires that the permanent secretary is able to put their political craft and *dienstwissen* into play in the process in order to avoid violating norms and craft a solution that the minister is happy about.

The permanent secretaries are assisting with *fachwissen* during meetings, and if their knowledge falls short, the turning-head practice ensures someone

else will answer the question. However, a permanent secretary can also assist their minister during a meeting in other ways, such as asking a strategic question, placing a pen so it strategically points towards something the minister should have in mind etc.

Even when the permanent secretary is relatively passive during a meeting, their presence can nevertheless be of significance. Among other things, this is because the permanent secretary discusses both the substance and process of the specific case with their minister, thus helping the minister to navigate parliamentary minefields and to craft policy initiatives. This requires that the permanent secretary is able to draw on both their *fachwissen*, *dienstwissen*, political craft and their social skills.

While the division heads can stand in for the permanent secretary if necessary, the permanent secretary's overview of the activities within the ministry cannot be replaced with the knowledge of a single head of division. However, the permanent secretary's knowledge of specific cases might fall short, making it necessary to ask a head of division for advice.

Chapter 9.

Policy development

Developing policy is a complicated process, and the process will differ from ministry to ministry, from minister to minister, and on many other factors. Some policy development stems from very concrete ideas, other policies develop out of broad political visions. The development of new policy requires collaboration between minister and bureaucrats, because the minister usually lacks the technical knowledge required to inform the policy solution. As the quote below illustrates, ministers and their special advisors require assistance to convert political vision to policy. While many actors are important in the development of new policy solutions, this section focuses on the role of the permanent secretary in policy development. The chapter is mainly based on interviews.

But permanent secretaries can contribute quite a lot to policy development (...) Politicians and ministers – they aren't people who have gone to some long management school. They can talk about anything and everything, and it could be nice to get some of this kind of thing more generally translated into some policy and some decisions and action (PS 19).

The chapter begins with analysis of how the broader visions are identified and point to the fact that ministers do not always have a clear political vision for their ministerial remit. Thus, they may require some help to find a broader political vision. Second, the chapter deals with how such broader political vision is translated into more concrete policy. Among other things, it points to the permanent secretaries' important function of balancing their minister's focus; for instance, by ensuring that all parts of the ministerial remit are considered, also together with longer-term considerations.

9.1 Identifying political problems and political visions

The development of new policy usually begins with a political vision or is presented as a solution to a current problem. My interview material illustrates that coming up with ideas and problems is sometimes less than straightforward. This can be frustrating for the minister, who can experience a loss of control.

MINISTERS NEED HELP. The following section is concerned with the origin of ideas. One may think the minister has clear policy visions within their remit

upon taking over a ministry, but this is often not the case; not all ministers have past experience from working with the ministry's remit, and some have only a vague notion of their party's positions relating to it. As Minister 6 says:

Overall, a lot of people imagine that a minister says: 'I want this policy', and then the civil servants start doing it. That's not how it works at all. Firstly, a lot of ministers don't have enough knowledge of their area to come up with very specific proposals. They don't know all the objections or problems that can result from doing something. And even though I dare say that I have good insight into my area of responsibility, there are still things I don't know about – what they looks like in reality. This is a premise most ministers have: the translation work taking place between politician and civil servant (M 6).

The translation work referred to here by the minister is usually the permanent secretary's responsibility. The permanent secretary is the link between minister and civil service, which renders them an essential element in policy development. Because the minister might not know what to do and what policy one wants, the civil service can have a major impact and play an important role in policy development. Permanent Secretary 19 confirms this:

A lot about a minister doesn't happen in terms of, 'now I want to ask for such and such.' It's like... somehow, you find out what is being used, what is needed (PS 19).

This means that the permanent secretaries must help their minister to figure out what they want and to determine their goals as minister. As mentioned elsewhere, ministers from the same party might have different goals, and it is therefore not enough to know the positions of the different parties – you need to figure out what this specific minister wants. If the minister does not know, the permanent secretaries can help them to figure out their goals.

CIVIL SERVICE DEVELOPS POLICY IDEAS. Civil servants are important when developing new policy, and they prepare a list of potential problems and policy suggestions when a new minister is appointed:

When a government walks through the door, it's only natural that they come in with, 'We have these seven things. We want you to do them'. Fine, we get started with them. But they also have to look at us and then ask, is there anything we should look at? (PS 15).

According to the permanent secretaries and division heads, ideas for policy can stem from different places. One of them is spotting problems or areas where improvements can be made. This can happen through analysis or close dialogue with the relevant stakeholders. Civil servants can also be inspired by

initiatives in other countries or by technological developments. Finally, inspiration might stem from the realization that something is not working as expected when implemented, thus creating new problems or not solving the initial problem. This can lead to new takes on how to solve an issue. As Permanent Secretary 5 explains:

But where does the inspiration come from? Sometimes it's because you do a systematic analysis that points out the problems. Other times, it's because you talk to someone and become wiser about something you experience out there. You see other countries that have done something, one way or another. You talk to people who understand digitization or artificial intelligence, and you think: 'If they can make those gains, could we also use it in our field and get something out of it?' But above all: it isn't me alone who gets those ideas. It's something that happens in close interaction with all of our employees and everyone we talk with in general. Also with ministers, the Folketing etc. (PS 5).

The permanent secretary stresses how they are not the only one getting these ideas, but that ideas also come from lower-ranking bureaucrats in the ministry who shed light on problems or ways the minister can perform better. The permanent secretary points to the permanent civil service as a key factor in being able to help the minister to detect problems in this manner. Several permanent secretaries and division heads raise this point.

THE MINISTER DEVELOPS IDEAS. The minister is a central actor with respect to identifying problems and presenting visions for the ministry's remit. While I have not obtained enough empirical material to make a comprehensive analysis of how the ministers come up with policy initiatives, as one permanent secretary explains:

Our ministers have become ministers because they have political projects because of which the people have elected them (PS 17).

The permanent secretaries must therefore de-code these projects and help their ministers to reach their goals. Another permanent secretary underlines how the political intention should come from the minister, after which the permanent secretary can help realize their ideas.

AT: What is your most important task for the minister?

PS 1: It's to make sure that the minister's political intentions come out and touch reality. And it's a long, fine process, where you have to start by saying: 'What do you want?', Come up with suggestions for: 'If you want this, then you can do it like this'. You have professional knowledge there. But the value and intention have to come from the minister.

This statement also indicates that politicians can start with political intentions and visions, where the civil service first become involved in the second step: converting idea to concrete policy.

POLICY IDEAS AS COLLABORATION. One of the ministers points out that she believes policy ideas arise in collaboration between minister and civil service. The inspiration from the civil service stems from one place – *fachwissen* or *dienstwissen* – while the inspiration from the politician stems from interactions with the real world (i.e., talking to stakeholders, citizens etc).

The permanent secretary said to me at one point: ‘a good state is effective and legitimate’. The permanent secretary is responsible for it being effective. My job is to legitimize it, because I have a popular mandate. Politics must be born as a child between the two of us. The permanent secretary brings to the table that they have previously been working in the fourth office and found out that here is a rule that is nonsense. So they recommend that we change it. And I have to say: I’ve heard down in the supermarket that people think this is a problem. And then it’s in fusion between what I hear down in the supermarket and what the permanent secretary hears from the fourth office that new legislation needs to be born. And there, I just have to acknowledge the challenges of how, at our wedding, there’s only me and my special advisor on my side of the family, and then 1300 civil servants on the permanent secretary’s side. So our task of having a political look at things is just underrepresented (M 5).

The minister explains that policy should arise as a combination of problems identified by the politician based on their dialogue with citizens and interaction with society, whereas the civil servants base it on *dienstwissen* and *fachwissen*. However, she also points out a potential imbalance in the dialogue triggered by the civil servants outnumbering the politicians.

THE GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN. Besides the minister’s own ideas, there will often be a ‘paper of understanding’ (*forståelsespapir*) between the government and the supporting parties. During the period of research, the ministers also had to craft four-year action plans for their ministries, where they elaborated on the overall policy goals for their own ministerial remit. The plans are aligned with the PMO, which maintains overview of all the ministries.

The permanent secretaries were attentive to these overall policy objectives, which range from considering them during the discussions in the preparatory government committees to being aware of the ‘no-fly zones’ that such plans entail. Excerpt 9.1 below is a short excerpt that illustrates a permanent secretary who proactively follows up on the overall government project. In the excerpt, the permanent secretary is in his office preparing written material to

the minister. The permanent secretary asks the public relations manager (*pressechef*) if there really is not a *no-fly zone*, which refers to a period in which the ministries should not launch political initiatives because an important initiative is being launched. The public relations manager confirms that the ministry has the green light to announce new initiatives.

Excerpt 9.1. Government coordination and no-fly zones

The permanent secretary shouts out to the front office if it is the press officer he can hear outside. The front office confirms this to be the case, and they ask if the permanent secretary wants the press officer in their office. The permanent secretary would like that. The press officer enters. The permanent secretary says that he is getting in touch with the PM's permanent secretary, but he wants to ask the press officer if it is true that there is no no-fly zone in relation to making announcements. The press officer confirms this.

This apparently minor interaction illustrates how the permanent secretary takes other ministries' policy initiatives into consideration. During my fieldwork, I heard several permanent secretaries call attention to the political initiatives within their ministerial remit that are part of the four-year action plan. Concurrently, they also referred to the paper of understanding from time to time. Overall, this reflects how these plans are something that the civil servants are aware of and consider when discussing policy initiatives with their minister. These papers usually outline the overall vision, and the specific shaping of the policy must be formulated.

IMBALANCE BETWEEN CIVIL SERVICE AND MINISTER? In the quote above, the minister argues that his side of the political ideas is under-represented, because there are so few people who see the policy from the minister's side (i.e., the party-political side). Only the special advisor, the political spokesperson, and the minister see policy initiatives from the same party-political angle. In contrast, there is an entire ministry who contributes with the other perspective. Ministers thus find themselves somewhat alone and isolated in the process of generating new policy ideas, despite the large organization beneath them. Concurrently, another minister argues that the size of the permanent civil service relative to the minister and their special advisor renders the permanent civil service relatively strong compared to the minister. Thus, Minister 6 finds that they not only lack a political take on policymaking but also that the permanent civil service can sometimes be difficult to control:

We actually have reasonably well-functioning state apparatuses – they're reasonably efficient in many ways. Also if you compare with other countries, if you compare with Europe (...) But we also have an apparatus that is so powerful that ... the political control becomes weak. This is a problem, because it affects the ability to act politically, the possibility of acting politically (...) People have voted for a certain policy. And then one must [as minister, AT] try to hold on to the reins as well as possible. Of course, there's always an entire government to reach agreement with. That's okay. But it shouldn't be the system that trips you up. And there – I've experience many times that ministers have become too weak in relation to the systems. That we simply have such skilled civil servants and well-functioning systems that have kind of developed lives of their own (M 6).

Thus, the minister argues that she sometimes feels as though she is not in control: that the minister is too weak compared to the system. The involvement of civil servants in identifying problems becomes too dominant. The argument is that the ministry has a political agenda that the civil servants try to impose on the minister. Some ministers find that the daily structures in the ministries make it very hard to stand up to the pressure from the civil servants.

One of the permanent secretaries supports the minister's experience, recounting how there have been examples of the civil servants being so engaged in other matters that they cannot deal with the minister's political visions and ideas.

There are many who can dynamically tell you examples of ministers who came back from summer vacation and say that now they have made a list of 10 things they would like the ministry to do something about. (...) And then it disappeared, because you didn't have time for it, the ministry was so busy with everything else. So they never got to it. It was elegantly dismantled, no? And then it was, in fact... the minister was treated as someone who works for the ministry and had to, like, carry things forward and be accountable for it (PS 3).

Thus, the minister was treated as someone working for the ministry instead of the ministry working for the minister. Following this quote, the permanent secretary continues to explain their awareness of this problem and how they work to avoid it. Nonetheless, as another permanent secretary says, it can be difficult to change the direction of a ministry as fast as the ministers expect. Permanent Secretary 5 argues how, as permanent secretary, they are responsible for ensuring that the change will happen but admits that they sometimes fail to translate the minister's ideas to changes through the civil service.

To be honest, there is sometimes inertia in such a system. Sometimes you find that a minister feels, 'Now I have again and again said I want something and it just doesn't happen'. This falls back on me, I feel – that I haven't managed to translate the Minister's desires into a new work package that matches the wishes. And I would say that it is more the rule than the exception that there are areas

where the ministers think we're too slow to rectify. They are not the same from minister to minister, but there are simply some things that are obviously difficult to change. Even if we try as hard as we possibly can (PS 5).

Whether the civil servants are deliberately trying to control the ideas and policymaking is disputed in my interviews, where the ministers have different perceptions of the civil servants' intentions. Minister 1 explains how, in their experience with the civil servants and permanent secretary, they are working loyally for the minister, and that they strive to do what the minister wants. Instead, Minister 1 points out the problem that some ministers have no political vision, are imprecise when conveying their visions to the civil service, or simply lack a basic understanding of their ministerial remit. Thus, Minister 1 argues that the civil servants only step into the 'space of power' (*magtens rum*) when the minister does not occupy this space:

The power has no void. If the politician doesn't step into the space of power, then the system will step into the space of power. So that's why permanent secretaries go in: if politicians don't pull enough politically and don't want the power enough. I don't experience, as it is sometimes portrayed, the permanent secretary as a 'prince of darkness' who wants to decide everything. My experience is that the permanent secretaries genuinely want to do what the ministers want. But sometimes the minister just isn't very specific about what they want: Sometimes because they don't know what they want, sometimes because they don't understand their area, sometimes because they're not skilled. And then the permanent secretaries step into the space of power (M 1).

Minister 6 argued earlier that there is no room for the minister to take control over the ministry. In contrast, Minister 1 argues that if the minister does not take control over the ministry, then room is created for the permanent secretaries and the remaining civil servants to take control. While Minister 6 places the responsibility on the bureaucracy and ministerial structures, Minister 1 argues that the ministers are responsible for taking the power:

If the minister and government can't figure out what they want, then the permanent secretary will ensure something happens. But as long as you know what you want, it isn't my experience that the permanent secretaries have an independent political agenda that they pursue (M 1).

This minister's views on the civil service are also those that are generally conveyed by the permanent secretaries and division heads: a civil service working loyally to translate the minister's political visions into policy, also when being proactive in terms of identifying problems. In this regard, Permanent Secretary 8 emphasizes that civil servants do not have their own agenda, but are in fact loyally trying to help their minister:

Sometimes, there can be an idea about civil servants having their own agenda. And I can say, at least for my own part and the view I have of my colleagues, is that this is completely wrong. They have a very, very loyal and very professionally competent civil service, which consistently does what it can to help their minister (PS 8).

In general, the permanent secretaries and division heads paint a picture of a civil service that works to help the minister, which means changing course when a new minister is appointed.

FACHWISSEN BLOSSOMS DURING UNCERTAINTY. Further along these lines, one permanent secretary points out the importance of the minister giving feedback to the civil service to ensure that they work towards the minister's goals. If the permanent secretary does not have the time to translate the messages from minister to ministry, then *fachwissen* will blossom (i.e., the system does not just stop working). Instead, the work will be shaped predominantly by *fachwissen*:

I spend time giving feedback, but you don't always reach everyone. If you don't provide proper response, then the systems start to work, and there's nothing wrong with that, it's just the remit-specific dynamic that then flourishes (PS 14).

The permanent secretary thus attributes the independence of the system from the minister to a lack of information or lack of translation from the permanent secretary. While there might be *fachwissen* blossoming into policy if the minister's ideas aren't conveyed to the permanent civil service, the permanent civil service generally expresses how they strive to support the minister's policy ideals and the minister's identification of problems in the society. In short, Permanent Secretary 1 states how the political vision should stem from the minister:

It's a long process; from having to start by saying: 'What do you want?', to coming up with suggestions for: 'If you want this, then you can do that'. You have professional knowledge there. But the value and intention must come from the minister (PS 1).

The permanent secretary hereby emphasizes the importance of the *intention* coming from the minister. Permanent Secretary 11 agrees that the definition of what constitutes a problem or challenge in society is a *political* choice (i.e., the minister's choice). She argues further that there will always be some way to support the minister on the basis of *fachwissen*, no matter the problem:

There is no single professionalism. We can easily provide professional/technical support to a Social Democratic minister and a Venstre minister. They have different opinions, and they can easily have that based on professional, technical

aspects. That's often what goes wrong in the discussion: it's as though there is one professional/technical answer. There isn't. As Social Democratic minister, you can easily believe that society has three major problems, which you can easily believe are problems from a professional/technical point of view. The Venstre minister may think that there are three other main problems in society, which can easily be regarded as problems from a professional/technical angle. So it's not because we have a list with the answers in some areas. We have a list with the answers in the sense that we can compare the economics involved and stuff like that. But in terms of how society is organized, what's important and what's not important – that's a political choice. That's why we have them (PS 11).

In general, the permanent secretaries convey an image of themselves as a group that works to fulfil the ministers' goals.

PERMANENT SECRETARY BALANCES THE MINISTER'S IDEAS. Nevertheless, a couple of the permanent secretaries with whom I spoke argue that their focus might differ from the minister's focus on occasion in an attempt at balancing out the minister; hence, the imperative to protect the ministry and the ministry's interests. For instance, if the minister predominantly focuses on the short run, the permanent secretary must still ensure that long-term consequences are considered. Concurrently, if the minister has different portfolios, the permanent secretaries find themselves responsible for ensuring a focus on all aspects of the minister's remit:

AT: What about a minister who somehow has two portfolios? What does that entail for you as permanent secretary?

PS 21: A kind of compensatory mindset. It's very common for a minister who comes in and gets a 'double ministry' to have the one or the other as their main interest. And then my job is to remind them that the other part of the store also exists – or maybe to do a little more myself in the area that the minister is less interested in (PS 21)

Thus, the permanent secretary argues that they must compensate for that which the minister does not consider; in this case, reminding the minister about their other portfolio. In other cases, this could be consideration of possible long-term problems, the other government objectives etc. As Permanent Secretary 5 comments:

There will be ministers who are preoccupied with the 'here and now' in relation to what their big initiative looks like in the press. And there will be others who focus on what society should look like in 10 years in their area. And we have to work with both (PS 5)

The permanent secretaries must concern themselves with both the short-term and long-term perspectives; that is, to compensate for what the minister might find less important in the here and now.

9.2 Converting political vision to policy solutions

Once a problem is identified or a political vision has been expressed, then it should be developed into concrete policy solutions. The civil service is largely responsible for developing concrete solutions to more or less abstract ‘problems’, and the permanent secretary is usually a pivotal actor in this process:

Well, we’re policymakers. I believe this is a completely legitimate part of the civil service in the system we have in Denmark. You can’t leave the policy development completely, leaving the minister completely alone with his special advisor. Of course, they also develop policy. But they rightly also look to us, asking ‘if we want to do something about [this problem], what can we come up with?’ (PS 15)

Thus, a permanent secretary is responsible for presenting their minister with solid, technically sound policy solutions that are expected to work in practice, realistic to enact, and possible to implement. To do so, the permanent secretaries must bring their expertise in the area, the ministry’s collective memory, and their political-tactical knowledge into play. I will elaborate on these aspects below.

FACHWISSEN – FROM VISION TO SOLUTION. The permanent secretary will usually initiate a written basis for making a decision, usually presenting different policy solutions and the estimated consequences hereof. While the permanent secretary does not work out these solutions on their own, it is their responsibility to ensure that the basis for the solutions is sound; that they are based on professional- and technical knowledge. Permanent Secretary 17 articulates the task of the permanent secretaries as follows:

To try to translate a political vision or a political desire about which direction the minister wants society to move into, or there’s an issue you want to have solved and then come up with some professionally/technically grounded solutions that you actually expect will work (PS 17).

The permanent secretary is hereby pointing out the importance of presenting thoroughly considered technical solutions while simultaneously stressing how the solutions should be expected to be an effective solution to the problem. This includes, but is not limited to, ensuring the legality: ‘The solutions must be legal. And if they aren’t, then we must show the minister how to establish a legal basis’ (PS 4). Thus, the basis for making a decision should include the

presumed consequences of the policy solution. Such a basis for decision-making can thereby open the minister's eyes to consequences of which they might not have previously been aware, thus allowing the minister to make a more informed decision. Permanent Secretary 2 thus describes how they, among other things, should:

... Qualify on the basis of the political intention of the minister and the government: What can be relevant to do? Is it well illuminated? What are the consequences? What does it take? How can I implement it? And so on (PS 2).

Thus, the permanent secretaries are important for ensuring that there is sufficient light on the different solutions, fully illuminating their strengths and weaknesses. This ranges from coming up with the solutions to thinking about how they can be enacted and implemented.

COMBINING POLITICAL-TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS WITH *FACHWISSEN*. As Chapter 7 on providing counsel illustrated, the combination of *fachwissen* and political-tactical considerations improves the enacted policy. Concurrently, several permanent secretaries emphasize the importance of finding effective and sustainable policy solutions. They point to the importance of a permanent bureaucracy in securing solutions that will not only please the minister but also be sustainable solutions for Denmark in the longer run. Permanent Secretary 19 refers to the combination of professional and political expertise as the prerequisite for being able to ensure long-term solutions:

It's a great strength in Denmark that the expertise that the permanent secretaries represent in my eyes – it somehow becomes integrated in the political process. In other words, you can say that the political-tactical advice is given on a professional basis. I think that's a strength. (...) I have a relatively strong professional starting point or commitment to good solutions. Solutions shouldn't just be solutions. It isn't just a minister who should be satisfied. There's something that needs to work in society. And we also have a society in five years – how does that relate to the decisions today? I think it's probably quite unique in terms of decision-making that the angle or that focus comes as far at the end of the decisions, as is the case in Denmark (PS 19).

While the permanent secretaries argue that they try to find the best possible solutions, even though it is also pointed out by a permanent secretary that not all problems have a good solution, but there are many problems to which you can find a solution. Hence, sometimes the permanent secretaries' efforts to find the best possible solutions, even when they are unable to find good solutions.

Permanent Secretary 5 points to the permanent civil service as improving the prerequisites for considering solutions that are long-term sustainable:

That [policy development, AT] is an absolutely important task and possibly part of where we have an advantage in Denmark – with a civil service with considerable continuity. That we actually have, I think, better conditions than so many others to turn on the high beams and think five and ten years ahead. Without thinking about how we will have been fired long ago (PS 5).

Thus, the permanent secretaries navigate a triangle of sustainability considerations: *fachwissen*, administrative considerations ('Can it be implemented and administered in practice?'), and political considerations. While the minister call the shots, so to speak, the permanent secretaries work to ensure that the solutions are sustainable on these parameters. This also becomes evident in excerpt 9.2 below, which illustrates how these different aspects are considered when developing new policy initiatives. The permanent secretary must consider the political environment alongside practical implications regarding implementation, administration and other professional considerations.

Excerpt 9.2. The permanent secretary returns after negotiation meeting

The permanent secretary walks towards his office. On the way, they ask the front office to ask a head of division to come by when they have the time. (...)

The head of division enters the permanent secretary's office. The permanent secretary talks about the meeting with the spokesperson, but has just a few professional/technical questions in continuation of the conversation. 'What happens if you move the period?', asks the permanent secretary, and the head of division explains. 'What if we do this and that instead', the permanent secretary wants to know. 'Then it becomes really difficult to implement', the head of division responds. It is quiet for over half a minute. The head of division comes up with a proposal for how to deal with it. The permanent secretary believes that the spokesperson is engaging in a bit of 'political teasing' and is simply trying to position himself, and therefore proposes presenting Plan A (the head of division's proposal) and Plan B to the minister. They discuss Plan B a bit back and forth. The head of division ends up concluding that he wouldn't call Plan B the best solution, but that it is the only way he can see a majority. (...)

This excerpt illustrates how the permanent secretaries have a holistic perspective on policy development and that they try to find solutions that are sustainable on all three parameters.

THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF THE MINISTRY. In order to secure the best possible basis for making a decision, it is often important to bring the ministry's collective memory into play. Has the ministry made similar initiatives in

the past? How did that work out? Because the permanent secretaries have different experience from their respective ministries (Trangbæk, forthcoming), they have different qualifications when it comes to contributing with this themselves. For instance, in excerpt 9.3, where the permanent secretary wants to add some ‘history’ on the previous development of the case to the written note (*håndakt*) for the minister.

Excerpt 9.3. The ministry’s memory

The permanent secretary comes out into the front office and finds, with a twinkle in his eye, that he is hit by his great knowledge. He would have liked to add to the *håndakt* that a minister under the Thorning government approved the case, but that the Ministry of Finance at the time said no. The permanent secretary remarks that he thinks they should write this to the current minister, so that he knows that there may be other actors at the coming meeting with extensive knowledge of the case.

If the permanent secretary is new to the ministerial remit, it is likely that someone else in the ministry has extensive knowledge of the ministry and its past. During my field studies, I usually encountered at least one bureaucrat who could draw on their extensive experience within the ministry’s remit when discussing specific cases. This included, but was not limited to, whether such a suggestion had been discussed before, why it was not chosen, how adjustments could be made to make it acceptable etc. In this manner, the permanent secretary can usually draw on the collective ministerial experience to assess the policy solutions.

As excerpt 9.4 below illustrates, the permanent secretary helps the minister to remember different aspects of the case when discussing it with the minister. This ranges from reminding the minister about their own past statements and accounting for *fachwissen*, previous choices (i.e., why we did not continue with the other idea) etc.

Excerpt 9.4. The Minister's memory

The minister and special advisors sit with the minister for case review. They have reached the penultimate case. The permanent secretary says that they have reached a follow-up on a case that they have previously met about. The minister then reads a passage aloud from the case and asks about the phrasing. The permanent secretary replies that this is something the minister has previously stated. The minister reads on and asks further follow-up questions. Finally, the minister asks if the answer is to be handed in now? The permanent secretary replies that the minister can polish some sentences, but that it cannot wait until the end of the month. The minister's secretary then suggests that the minister can read it again during transport the next day.

During various meetings with external and internal actors, the minister asks the permanent secretary about various things that the minister cannot remember (this is not speculation on my part; they sometimes said that they did not remember and asked the other civil servants). One of the reasons the ministers are keen to have the permanent secretary participate in meetings is also because they can help observe and remember what happened at the meeting, as pointed out in Chapter 7 on providing counsel.

INVOLVING THE STAKEHOLDERS. The stakeholders are important in several aspects, which is why Chapter (x) is dedicated to this. However, the stakeholders also deserve mention here, as they are essential to policy preparation.

Several permanent secretaries emphasize that it is not only about providing the solid basis for decision-making; the process involved is also essential. The relevant stakeholders should be included in this process, both because they might contribute with important knowledge and to increase the likelihood of being able to carry out the policy solution:

even if you had full foresight and knew exactly how wise it was to do [...], I would still recommend a process where you involve the stakeholders and clarify what you think – and get as much input as possible along the way. This is how you 1) can make a very well-thought-out decision, but 2) also have a pretty good chance to be able to bring it to life. And the two things can't be separated. So there's also something with the process, right from starting with something (PS 8).

Thus, the permanent secretary can play an important part in ensuring that the stakeholders are involved in the development of new policy, among other things by including the stakeholders in different places and in various phases of the policy development. For instance, they clear the content of policy initiatives with stakeholders before making announcements. Thus, the stakeholders are involved and taken seriously. This was also the case during the 'meet

and great' between the minister and the stakeholders presented in excerpt 9.5 below. Here, one of the representatives mentions a cutback within their area, which clearly surprises the minister and permanent secretary. The permanent secretary notes it down and, after the meeting, the minister wants to know if the permanent secretary knows what the representative was talking about, which he does not. They agree on the need to follow up on the episode.

Excerpt 9.5. Did you know that?

There is a meeting-and-greet in the minister's office involving the Minister, the permanent secretary and the minister's secretary. The minister is leading the meeting and engages in direct dialogue with the interest group's three representatives. At one point, the interest group tells of some cuts that have been announced in their area. The minister jerks his head and sends a confused look at the permanent secretary, his eyebrows drawn and brow furrowed. The permanent secretary also looks surprised and notes this down on the cover, which was wrapped around the *håndakt* for the meeting. (...) After the interest group representatives leave, the permanent secretary and minister chat together. The Minister wants to know if the permanent secretary knows anything about the cutbacks, but the permanent secretary does not. The permanent secretary says that they have to follow up on the matter, and they leave the room.

This excerpt reflects how interest organizations are taken seriously. When the representatives from the interest organization present them with information that the minister and permanent secretary were surprised to hear about, they follow up on it. During my fieldwork, I observed several meetings with external stakeholders, and there were phone calls and texts from permanent secretaries to stakeholders and vice versa (please see Chapter 17 for a more elaborated analysis of the stakeholders).

GETTING GOVERNMENT AND PARLIAMENT ON BOARD. On top of the external stakeholders, the process usually involves presenting the policy solution to government. It could for instance be discussed in one of the standing government committees, which also involves presentation in the relevant preparatory government committee, where the permanent secretary responsible for the area obtains input from the other permanent secretaries (see Chapter 15 for an exposition of the government committees). Subsequently, it needs to be a policy solution that the politicians can reach agreement on (i.e., that can be enacted politically):

My job is to find solutions to the problems facing the minister that they want solved. (...) Politically, the solution to a problem is found once a political agreement has been made (PS 4).

Cf. Permanent Secretary 4, the politicians often consider policy development to be completed once a political agreement has been reached. For the permanent secretaries, however, that is merely the beginning. After that comes the implementation of the policy solution, 'which is often greatly underestimated by politicians in the short run' (PS 4).

9.3 Conclusion

When there is a political problem that requires a solution or a political vision that needs to be transformed into tangible policy solutions, the permanent secretaries play a pivotal role. They are usually responsible for communicating the overall vision downwards in the ministry as well as bearing the responsibility for communicating the possible policy solutions to the minister. This makes the permanent secretaries the final quality assurance before the suggested policy proposals reach the minister. The permanent secretary is responsible for assuring that the policy proposals:

- Have a sound technical/professional basis, including an assessment of legal questions
- Draw on the ministry's past experience
- Showcase the estimated consequences of the different solutions, thus ensuring that the minister can make a well-informed decision
- Ensure that the relevant stakeholders have been involved in the process

The permanent secretaries should also assist in the process of getting the policy solution enacted, which involves providing political-tactical advice on the different possible combinations for obtaining a majority in the Folketing, advice on possible adjustments to the policy solutions aimed at finding a majority, etc.

Chapter 10.

The executive triangle: minister, permanent secretary and special advisor

In this section, I will delve into four aspects of the special advisor's role followed by an analysis of the relation between minister, permanent secretary and special advisor. First, I describe five typical tasks carried out by special advisors. I then elaborate on the relation between the permanent secretaries and the special advisors. Finally, I examine the permanent secretaries' attitudes towards the special advisors. The chapter is based on a combination of fieldnotes and interviews with permanent secretaries, ministers and division heads. Please note that while I had informal conversations with some special advisors, I did not interview any of them, and the focal point of the observations was in fact the permanent secretary. Hence, this is not a description made by the special advisors themselves.

10.1 What does a special advisor do?

The role of special advisors varies and 'there are just as many different ways to be a special advisor as there are special advisors' (PS 16). Some permanent secretaries mention this explicitly, but it also becomes clear when the interviewees are asked to describe what the special advisors do. In the interviews, the different types of special advisors are attributed to how the minister is completely free to select the special advisor of their choosing. When selecting a special advisor, the minister does not have to rely on meritocratic criteria. The main competencies of the special advisor differ accordingly, creating a position with plenty of room for interpretation of the role. Head of Division 5 describes this as follows:

... How you work with different special advisors depends incredibly much on who is in the house at a given time, because they come in with *very* different skillsets. And ministers also use them extremely differently (HoD 5).

The head of division further argues that the respective qualifications of the permanent secretary and special advisor influence their roles and the division of labour between them. The interviewee explains that the minister influences this division of labour through the 'use' of them (i.e., what they want the special advisor and permanent secretary to each focus on). Several permanent secretaries emphasize this, including Permanent Secretary 17, who says that the function depends on 'How the minister uses their special advisors, and

therefore their roles have been different'. In the following, I present five general kinds of tasks carried out by the special advisors: 1) being a party-political actor, 2) conveying contact with interest organizations and spokespersons, 3) assisting with policy development and political-strategic thinking, 4) assisting with communication, and 5) ensuring that the agenda of the permanent civil service and the minister's agenda are in accord with one another.

BEING A PARTY-POLITICAL ACTOR. The special advisor is expected to take care of party-contact and party interests, including contact to the minister's constituency association, discussions on party-political issues, and analysis of how the electorate is thinking. This function is unique for the special advisor, because the permanent civil service is neutral (i.e., not hired as political civil servants). The permanent civil servants are therefore reluctant to take part in the contact to the minister's party; instead, the special advisor and minister can divide the party contact between them:

... [Special advisors, AT] can help the minister with some things that the civil service can't help them [the ministers, AT] with. First and foremost, the contact with their political base [bagland, AT] and the more party-political dimension, which is also important. We can't help them with that at all. And then the special advisors typically have some other perspectives; they typically have inside knowledge of the parties and have some other angles (PS 8).

Overall, the permanent secretaries distinguish between political-tactical advice versus party-political advice. As Permanent Secretary 1 says: 'I don't go in and do some kind of analysis of what promotes the party's upcoming local elections'. This is in accordance with the view of several ministers, such as Minister 3:

The special advisor has an eye on the party's overall policy and consider the party's policy as a whole. A permanent secretary shouldn't have to do that (M 3).

This minister expects the special advisor to think along party-political lines when giving advice, which is not expected of the permanent secretary. Permanent Secretary 1 thinks much the same way: 'Then there's a special advisor, who says: "If you want to make our voters happy, we suggest that you do this and that". I don't do that. I don't provide that kind of political advice. Nor should I'. If a minister more or less knows what she wants, however, then the permanent secretary can step in and help to formulate the policy on that basis:

But if the special advisors then come and advise the minister about what they have come up with themselves, and the minister says: 'I'd like this'. Then I can't say: 'No, you can't do that, because you need to make your voters happy'. So it's more the analysis of the very concrete party-politics thing. I have to be neutral

regarding party politics. What is it that benefits the party as such, that is an analysis the minister must make himself or with his advisor or other colleagues from his party. But when the minister has completed that analysis and wants it like that, I try to unfold it; and that, of course, becomes the party's policy (PS 1)

This difference is also pointed out by Minister 1, who distinguishes between two types of 'best solutions': 'after all, my special advisor is completely inside my "political workshop", also when choosing the right political solution. The permanent secretary is also helping to choose the right solution, but not from the perspective of party politics' (M 1).

Helping the minister also involves contacting special advisors in other ministries to discuss questions of a political nature. Special advisors can negotiate and align political aspects of a case or put out feelers in terms of learning about other ministers' opinions on an issue. As Permanent Secretary 9 explains:

It can also be in relation to the other ministries, if there's something to be dealt with at a level where it isn't about the civil service, but where it's more the ministers who just have to agree. Then they [special advisors, AT] can do it (PS 9).

I also encountered this type of coordination during my fieldwork. In excerpt 10.1 below, for instance, where the minister is preparing an upcoming meeting with an external stakeholder that will be held along with another minister. When discussing the strategy for the meeting, the minister explicitly asks the special advisor to clear a couple of things with the other minister's special advisor prior to the meeting.

Excerpt 10.1. Communicating at one's own level

There is a meeting in the minister's office with the minister, the permanent secretary, a special advisor, a head of division, an office manager, a rank-and-file civil servant and the minister's secretary. They are preparing for a difficult meeting they will have with another ministry and some organizations within the ministry's remit.

There is one particularly sensitive point on the agenda. The head of division says that he has coordinated with the head of division in the other ministry and elaborates on what they have talked about. The minister asks the special advisor to get hold of the other minister's special advisor to discuss whether the minister is aware of any specific aspects of this particularly sensitive point. The permanent secretary says, in continuation of this, that he has talked to the other minister about it, but that he will also address the permanent secretary in the other ministry before the meeting.

In short, the political aspect of the special advisor's work is diverse, ranging from party contact to professional back-and-forth on how to advance the party and coordination with other ministers (usually through other special advisors).

CONTACT TO EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS. The special advisors are also in contact with stakeholders within the minister's remit, including interest organizations and political spokespersons. While the permanent secretaries are also in contact with these groups (see Chapter 17), the special advisors are argued to have a slightly different function. The special advisors can promote the minister's agenda up front, 'it could be, for example, to explain a case to the spokespersons' (PS 9). When discussing a specific case, special advisors can take the liberty to expound on the minister's motive and, perhaps more importantly, special advisors can take the time for lengthy discussions with political spokespersons and interest organizations. According to Permanent Secretary 14, this comes in handy when providing counsel to the minister:

Because sometimes the special advisors can also translate a little more and spend a little more time on what the minister may be worried about. What is it that they [i.e. the special advisors, AT] hear, for instance when they talk to the spokespersons, when they talk to the stakeholders, etc? They are somehow the link. The minister can't sit and talk to all of the spokespersons or all of the stakeholders, so [the special advisor is, AT] an extremely important function in relation to the fact that we can also professionally/technically advise the minister in the best possible way (PS 14)

The quote illustrates how special advisors often have more time to engage in dialogue with external stakeholders than the minister and permanent secretary, who have many other obligations. The extent to which the minister delegates the contact with external stakeholders to the special advisor varies. In the example below, the permanent secretary underlines that the minister has chosen to delegate much of the contact with external stakeholders to the special advisor. Concurrently, the permanent secretary experiences less contact with these stakeholders. While the permanent secretary's tight schedule renders that useful, they also express concern regarding the risk of a decoupling between the administration and the political sphere. This underlines how the special advisor is considered a political actor with political expertise, but not necessarily someone with area-specific knowledge of the minister's remit:

The minister is not available to them. He has kind of chosen to say, 'I don't want to be some kind of lobby office'. So he has outsourced that to his special advisor. Because the minister has done so, but also because they find they can't get

through with lobbying towards me in the classical sense, a lot goes through the special advisor. He's the one they're trying to sweet-talk, right? So he spends a lot of time talking to interest groups. And that's both good and bad. It's good because he's dealing with all the 'noise'. It's bad because his role is not to make professional solutions for them and he doesn't have the prerequisites to do so. And there, you know, if they [the interest organizations, AT] don't at the same time have the contact to me and to the division heads who sit down here in this hallway, then you sometimes run the risk of the train running off the track. And I'm a little aware of that at the moment – if there's a risk that we're heading there. Because I don't feel they contact me nearly as much as they did in the past, and that's kind of a gift. But there's also a risk associated with it (PS 7).

The quotes also illustrates that the special advisor seems to have more freedom in the contact to the external stakeholders because he can discuss the political aspects of the cases. The special advisor can spend more time and take more liberties when discussing specific issues with interest organizations, political spokespersons and sector representatives. This includes, but is not limited to, the types of arguments that can be used and the more political agreements he can make.

Excerpt 10.2 below shows an example where the special advisor has been in contact with a political spokesperson on their own. The situation is a meeting about the ongoing negotiations in which a political spokesperson has presented an alternative suggestion. When discussing the content and reason why a political spokesperson has brought this suggestion to the negotiation table, the permanent secretary and special advisor seem to have different perspectives. The permanent secretary initially responds to the content of the suggestion (not realistic to implement) and secondly pinpoints potential strategic reasons for bringing up this suggestion. In contrast, the special advisor offers a more political perspective on the suggestion, among other things based on a previous conversation with the political spokesperson. The special advisor does not seem convinced by the reasoning of the permanent civil service as to why this alternative suggestion is not possible, and the permanent civil service must therefore once again explain why this solution is unfeasible.

Excerpt 10.2. The special advisor's perspective

The minister, the permanent secretary, two division heads, the special advisor and the minister's secretary sit around the table. The minister chairs the meeting and starts by stating that they will probably have to review the document with the spokesperson. The permanent secretary flicks through the document while the minister talks. Following the general remarks on the forthcoming meeting, the minister begins asking a number of questions. First, the minister asks for a definition. One of the heads of division responds with a technical explanation of how the analysis is done, as well as an answer to the alternative proposal that a specific spokesperson's party has come up with. The minister asks whether the spokesperson's proposal can work. 'No', the permanent secretary and head of division answer, almost in chorus, which makes the minister ask why the spokesperson has presented the proposal at all. The head of division begins to respond, but the other head of division quickly takes over. He again explains what the spokesperson's proposal is about and why it makes no sense. After some dialogue between the division heads and the minister about the difference in the content of the ministry's and spokesperson's proposals, the permanent secretary speaks up. The permanent secretary says that the ministry will have to write these things explicitly and answer why it is not a solution, just as he says there may be different strategic reasons why the spokesperson brings the proposal to the fore. The special advisor speaks up and presents her views on the proposal, based on her conversation with the spokesperson. But the proposal makes no sense, the permanent secretary insists, and is backed by the division heads, who once again explain why. The minister wants to know why they failed to explain it to the spokesperson. The head of divisions come up with some suggestions regarding the spokesperson's possible motivation. The minister's phone rings and the meeting is interrupted briefly.

There are two takeaways from this excerpt. First, the special advisor has had separate contact with the political spokesperson. It shows that special advisors have contact with external stakeholders on their own and may be able to take more liberties in the communication and agreements with external stakeholders than permanent civil servants can. However, a specific study of special advisors would be required to say anything more specific about their communication with external stakeholders. Second, the special advisor is first and foremost the minister's right hand man. This means that the special advisor is less knowledgeable about the feasibility and *fachwissen* perspective on a case, but think more about the political and tactical aspects.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT, POLITICAL-STRATEGICAL THINKING AND POLITICAL PITFALLS. Special advisors serve as their minister's discussion part-

ner on politics and policy development. The special advisor can give the minister another perspective on a case than the permanent secretary or serve as someone the minister can use as a sounding board. This potentially frees time from the permanent secretary, as Permanent Secretary 19 mentions:

It's good for the permanent secretary that there are others the minister can talk about things with. So the focus isn't just the permanent secretary. It's good to test things. Most politicians like to talk things over with different people (PS 19).

Some ministers also consider the special advisor as an ally in contrast to the permanent civil service. Thus, the minister might sometimes feel more confident that the special advisor's advice supports the minister's political project, because the special advisor is not a part of the system. As Minister 6 sees things:

The permanent secretary is the leader of this whole system. The special advisor is a free agent. Who is here to help me with my political project. And who is also collaborating with the party. Because I'm sitting here as a minister, but I'm also a representative of the party¹³, and the special advisor makes sure that things are connected in relation to the party (M 6).

This comes back to the special advisor's position as the link between party and minister, which provides unique party-political insight compared to the permanent civil service. Discussing party-political aspects is thus an important task, especially because some ministers feel alone with their party-political considerations, especially when comparing with the number of civil servants taking *fachwissen* into consideration. Especially Minister 5 seems frustrated with the lack of political considerations in the ministry.

M 5: And I feel when there are 1300 people to ... to make sure the law and administration are in place, but only 2-3 people to consider the political aspect.

AT: And which 2-3 people are those?

M 5: Me and my advisor. And then there's our spokesperson in the parliamentary group.

Minister 5 also argues that, 'from talking with my colleagues in other ministries, I can hear that it's the same'. However, my general impression is that this can vary greatly from minister to minister and from ministry to ministry.

Some special advisors also read the day-to-day cases. This was something I encountered during my fieldwork and which was flagged in some interviews. One permanent secretary tells how the current special advisor reads the cases

¹³ The actual party name has been replaced.

carefully to be able to flag potential political pitfalls. However, it is the minister who decides that the special advisor should spend time on reading cases.

Our current special advisor, he read very deep into the cases, is very interested in them, and looks through them to see if we can find political pitfalls in what might otherwise appear to be standard expedition cases. We have had special advisors in the past who did not involve themselves that much in that part at all, instead spending all their energy on the overall – the very obvious political signature issues (PS 17).

Whether the special advisor does engage in this seems to vary a lot, as other interviewees described this as a strength that the special advisor was not trapped under piles of cases. Again, the division of labour depends on what the minister wants from their special advisor.

In short, the special advisor serves as a political discussion partner for the minister; someone who can also engage in party-political considerations, someone whose main job is to be aware of political pitfalls – be they within the party, with other parties or among potential voters.

COMMUNICATION. In the past, special advisors were mainly referred to as spin doctors and they were often responsible for helping the minister with communication and handling the news media. Concurrent with the emergence of press units in the ministries, this function has become less distinct and the degree to which the special advisors are involved in communication varies. Still, communication is often mentioned as one of the special advisor's responsibilities; for instance, Head of Division 1 claims that 'the spin part, the communication part, we have special advisors for that'. Assisting with communication includes handling media requests but also framing the minister's policy:

We need to think about how it [the case, AT] relates to the other narratives in the area in question. And of course, I'm not the only one who thinks about it, even though it's not something all employees can do. But it's best if you as a civil servant aren't completely unfamiliar with the fact that the solution you present should be able to 'have a life' of its own and survive in a space where people use another language. This is often a situation where the special advisors assist (PS 4).

During my fieldwork, different situations required communication from the minister: presenting new policy initiatives, responding to front page scandals in the newspapers etc. This is illustrated in excerpt 10.3 below. In this example, the ministry was on the front page of a large Danish newspaper, and the minister needed to respond. In the morning, there were meetings with the minister, permanent secretary, special advisor, and the head of the press unit.

During the day, there had been several 5–10 minute conversations about the minister’s response within this group of people, and the special advisor has now arrived to present and discuss the latest draft with the permanent secretary.

Excerpt 10.3. The media – a big priority in everyday work

Shortly before lunch, the permanent secretary sits in her office as the special advisor arrives, walking at a brisk pace. He stands in the doorway. There seems to be satisfaction with the written material, says the special advisor in an old-fashioned tone of voice. The special advisor now enters the permanent secretary’s office, and the permanent secretary comes to the meeting table. They bend over the table and look at the same piece of paper that the special advisor has brought. The permanent secretary reads and then comes up with suggestions for changes, writing something on the paper. They quickly reach agreement, and the special advisor rushes out the door with the paper.

The excerpt shows that the special advisor and permanent secretary are both involved in the minister’s communication.

ENSURE THAT THE MINISTRY FOCUSES ON THE MINISTER’S AGENDA. Several ministers vented their frustration with their political agenda disappearing in the system or not being prioritized enough. Thus, they also consider it important that the special advisors ensure that the ministry agenda is aligned with the minister’s agenda:

my special advisor – it’s political-strategic. And they are a helping hand in pursuing a political agenda in a large system with many cases (...) if you don’t push your agenda through, there may be a tendency for it somehow to disappear in the system. There is therefore a need for me to have political-strategic advice and people who, together with me, can help push for my agenda to be on the system’s agenda (M 4).

This also concerns pushing the permanent civil service in terms of how cases are solved, if the civil servants are sure that the minister’s solution is not feasible, etc. Thus, ‘an advisor is also someone who can push against the system a little, and say: ‘Argh, is that really true?’ And that’s a good function, because the minister doesn’t always have the time and energy to do it’ (PS 14). The special advisor can thus ask questions they assume the minister would have asked, thereby promoting the minister’s agenda.

This can also be visible in other ways, such as the special advisor serving as messenger. In excerpt no. 10.4, the special advisor updates the permanent

secretary on the most recent news regarding the negotiations with other parties. As a follow-up, the special advisor wants to know whether the permanent secretary can take part in a meeting with the dissatisfied political spokespersons. Following this conversation, the minister enters the permanent secretary's office and the conversation starts over again. I interpret this situation in two ways: first, the special advisor keeps the permanent secretary informed about the negotiations; second, the special advisor wants to ensure that the permanent secretary's participate in the meeting with the political spokesperson.

Excerpt 10.4. The special advisor as the minister's right hand man

The permanent secretary is on the phone when the special advisor enters the office and asks if he can interrupt. The permanent secretary answers yes. The special advisor says that one of the parties in the negotiations has just announced that they reject the proposal because they want to use a different model. But it cannot be done in practice, explains the permanent secretary. The special advisor shrugs his shoulders and asks if the permanent secretary has time this afternoon, which the permanent secretary confirms. At that moment, the minister comes in and asks if the permanent secretary is talking on the phone. The permanent secretary replies that he has ended the call. Then the minister repeats what the special advisor has just said, and says that he has invited representatives from the political party over to a meeting later that afternoon and wants to know if the permanent secretary can participate. The permanent secretary confirms his participation in the meeting. The others leave the office shaking their heads, and the permanent secretary can continue the phone call.

(...) The permanent secretary asks the front office to clear the calendar for the afternoon, which means that an important internal meeting in which the permanent secretary **must** attend must be postponed until later that week. It shows how quickly the permanent secretary's calendar can change.

I do not know if the special advisor knew about the permanent secretary's calendar (he probably did not). Nevertheless, the result is that the permanent secretary needs to focus on the minister's upcoming meeting with the political spokesperson instead of the meeting regarding internal matters in the ministry (i.e., the day-to-day management of the ministry). This not only change the permanent secretary's schedule for the duration of the specific meeting, but also the afternoon leading up to the meeting, where the permanent secretary has several talks with different constellations of division heads, the minister and the special advisor. Even though the minister shows up shortly after the permanent secretary, I consider this an example of a special advisor who helps his minister to ensure that the permanent secretary assists the minister.

In short, the special advisor tries to ensure that the permanent civil service prioritizes the minister's agenda in their everyday work.

PRIORITIZATION OF TASKS. You might wonder how the special advisor devotes equal time to all of the above mentioned tasks. In short, they usually do not. The minister and special advisor have the liberty to shape the role as special advisor, albeit the minister's need is usually decisive (see excerpt 10.5 below). Hence, the combination of the different aspects of a special advisor's job varies. The only thing the special advisor formally cannot do is to give orders to the permanent civil service, but the special advisor can still make requests and collaborate with the permanent civil service on various levels in the ministerial organization.

I never observed the special advisor participating in the everyday running of the ministry; for instance they did not participate in group management meetings or the regularly scheduled follow-up meetings with agencies. Excerpt no. 10.5 illustrates a situation where the minister prioritizes the special advisor's presence in a meeting where the minister is being prepped for political negotiations. It also shows how the minister's prioritize on behalf of the special advisor.

Excerpt 10.5. Prioritization of the special advisor's time

The permanent secretary steps into the meeting room, where a minister's secretary is placing chairs around the table. There is going to be a meeting for the impending political negotiations. The minister, the permanent secretary, a committee consisting of other civil servants, and the minister's secretary are present. The minister asks where the special advisor is and is told that he is at a meeting with someone from a specific agency. The minister points out that this meeting is more important, and accepts the offer made by the minister's secretary to go get the special advisor. However, as the minister's secretary is on his way out the door to find the special advisor, the special advisor enters the room. He sits down next to the minister and, after a bit of introductory small talk, the meeting can begin.

Nevertheless, the permanent secretary may also be involved in figuring out how the special advisor is of best use to the minister. As Permanent Secretary 9 explains:

We also have a very open and honest talk about how we can best help each other. And how the special advisor can help the minister in the best possible way (PS 9).

The role of special advisors may therefore vary accordingly.

10.2 The relation between permanent secretary and special advisor

The special advisor is an important collaborator for the permanent secretary in their daily work. Permanent Secretary 17 says that ‘our special advisor, together with the heads of divisions, is the one in here who I clearly use the most for sparring’. Permanent secretaries often use the special advisor as a discussion partner to figure out the minister’s opinion or values. The degree of contact between permanent secretary and special advisor varies across ministries: ‘there are some [special advisors, AT] who would like to see me a lot, and some who just want to talk directly to the minister. But I try to use them, and I try to use them for what they can’ (PS 10). Throughout the fieldwork, some permanent secretaries and special advisors had frequent contact, whereas most seemed to interact during formal meetings.

The minister’s choice of special advisor and the minister’s idea of the special advisor’s function influence the relationship: ‘it depends on how the minister uses his special advisors, and therefore their roles have been different’ (PS 17). Regardless of their specific function, the special advisors can be really helpful for the permanent civil service in order to figure out what the minister’s opinion might be. This is important because the civil service might not be able to discuss it with the minister when needed because of their busy schedule. The special advisor can therefore serve as a proxy for the minister, as Permanent Secretary 17 explains:

So my calendar is hopeless. The minister’s calendar is often hopeless. Therefore the special advisor – because he’s a little better at staying in his office – he becomes a kind of stand-in. If you have something to discuss, you’d probably choose the minister, but he’s not there, and I’m not there, so you pull in the special advisor. It happens very often: ‘Okay, when we look at this, where do you think the minister would position himself on this?’ And then we go in and talk about it together. Then we end up somewhere where we have a qualified idea. And the special advisor clearly shares a joint political destiny with the minister that the special advisor – on some other parameters than the rest of us – sometimes has a strong idea of where exactly the minister wants to position himself on something. So in that sense, the special advisor becomes a proxy for the minister, if we just need to point out where the minister is positioning himself (PS 17).

The special advisor might have knowledge that the permanent civil service does not, partly due to their close relationship with the minister. At the same time, the special advisor might benefit from the permanent civil service’s technical, area-specific knowledge; that is, ‘they [special advisors, AT] can then

use me in relation to something professional/technical' (HoD 10). This is argued to strengthen the overall counsel provided to the minister; both from the permanent civil service and the special advisor.

Based on my data, it is difficult to assess the degree to which this professional back-and-forth ensures that the counsel provided to a minister is aligned. One permanent secretary says that it is sometimes useful to align the advice provided to the minister by the special advisor and the permanent civil service:

it depends on the situation. So you can make sure that, before discussing a matter with the minister, you ask, 'Where's the special advisor on this? What's he thinking?' And in that way also make sure to coordinate the advice so that the minister doesn't become... that we say 'A' and they say 'B' (PS 15).

However, it is not my general impression that the special advisor and permanent secretary are anxious about disagreeing or providing diverse or even disparate counsel to the minister. The special advisor and permanent secretary have different backgrounds and take part in different forums; for example, the special advisor might have heard something from the other special advisors that influences their opinion, whereas the permanent secretary might have another opinion based on something from the preparatory government committees. Thus, they have different perspectives. Their experience with the central administration might also vary greatly, as well as their relationships to political spokespersons, stakeholders etc. Their disparate knowledge may lead to different opinions.

DOES THE MINISTER LISTEN TO YOU? Two interviewees mention that the minister is sometimes more responsive to the special advisor's opinion than that of the permanent civil service. One permanent secretary and one head of division mention a strategy where one can attempt to prime the special advisors by giving them information that they might carry on to the minister, thereby influencing the minister's thinking indirectly.

It's like: Who has the minister's ear? Also just before you might have to make some decisions. In fact, it's quite important in general. There, it's good to work with the special advisor and explain how things fit or try to give input on things (PS 19).

Thus, instead (or on top) of discussing things directly with the minister, giving information to the special advisor can be a way whereby, 'one actually contributes to the minister's reflections by preparing the special advisors' (HoD 3). On the contrary, when the members of the civil service sense a lack of trust between special advisor and minister, they will minimize their contact to the special advisor. Similar dynamics occur within the group of special advisors,

where you will be kept out of the loop if the other special advisors sense that you are out of sync with your minister or if you do not know enough about what is going on.

WORKING AS A TEAM. All of the permanent secretaries argued that it is advantageous to have a good relationship with the special advisor because of the common goal: to help the minister. Thus, many permanent secretaries underlined how a well-functioning collaboration with the special advisor benefits the permanent secretary:

I have only experienced it [the collaboration with the special advisor, AT] as an advantage in relation to what it is all about: to realize the minister's policy and help the minister. A good special advisor is a permanent secretary's best friend. You're a team around the minister (PS 3)

In general, the permanent secretaries conveyed the collaboration with the special advisors as well functioning and relatively unproblematic. As Permanent Secretary 17 says: 'I can scarcely remember a special advisor with whom the ministry has not had a good relationship for many years'. It is usually important for the permanent secretary to ensure that the ministry welcomes the special advisor and to signal that they want to collaborate with them. They believe this to be an essential part of their service to the minister. Excerpt 10.6 below illustrates how one permanent secretary is very aware of continuously keeping the special advisor 'in the loop'.

Excerpt 10.6. Keeps the special advisor informed

There is a meeting in the permanent secretary's office regarding an international meeting the minister must attend. Only civil servants are present, and most of it is about practical circumstances, although the permanent secretary also challenges the civil servants on the content. At the end of the meeting, the permanent secretary asks if anyone has informed the special advisor about what has been talked about at the meeting. None of the civil servants have. The permanent secretary concludes that they should probably do so, even though the permanent secretary does not expect the special advisor to have any objections.

These observations during my fieldwork seem to be consistent with the permanent secretary's own perception of the relationship. The permanent secretaries underline the importance of making the relationship work; as Permanent Secretary 10 explains:

So I've made a virtue out of always, even to my own division heads, saying that it's just part of modern ministerial service that must work. And that means that

I don't try to keep anything secret from the special advisors. When the current special advisor started, I took him aside in the first week, and said: 'My only interest is for you and I to be able to work well together so that the minister does well'. That's my starting point ... (PS 10).

Minister 3, who sees the special advisor and permanent secretary as their most important discussion partners, also emphasizes the importance of teamwork. Thus, when there are challenges, difficult or messy cases on the minister's table, the minister will ensure that they can discuss it with both of them:

If I have a 'nut' that I'd like cracked, I'll get the permanent secretary and special advisor in the same room. Then we talk about it together. We're a strong team – the special advisor, my permanent secretary and me (M 3).

As mentioned previously, the special advisor's placement in the ministerial hierarchy is rather unique. They are placed below the permanent secretary (i.e., the permanent secretary is their leader), and special advisors have no right to give orders to the permanent civil service. Only one permanent secretary mentions that this arrangement can cause precarious situations (e.g., if a special advisor breaks the rules):

might be a little bit special (...) the fact that I'm also the personnel manager for the special advisor. That's why I'm the payroll negotiator. It's me who tells the special advisor that we log it when he uses the journal, and that it's okay to use it, but there are things he may see and things he may not. It has to be relevant and that kind of thing. In that sense, I'm the HR manager. If the special advisor needs to be given a warning, then I'm the one who has to give it. That would be completely weird. It would be very strange if that happened. But I would never call another [from another ministry, AT] special advisor. But I make a point of getting to know them, because it makes everyone's lives a little easier (PS 10).

I have only investigated this from the permanent secretaries' perspective, but if I had interviewed special advisors, I would expect this element to be more predominant in the interviews.

MINISTER AS MIDDLEMAN. A couple of interviewees point to the minister as an important factor in the relationship between special advisor and permanent civil service. Thus, Permanent Secretary 7 argues that how the minister chooses to lead the ministry will be reflected in the relationship between the permanent civil service and the special advisor. A minister who understands how to use the system will also do what they can to ensure a positive and productive relationship between the special advisor and permanent civil service:

Something I think can be difficult is how ministers use the civil service very differently. Some ministers come in the door and understand that they're

actually coming in and sitting in a real ‘muscle car’ that really, really can do something. If they’re very intelligent as organizational leaders or as managers, then they also understand how to use the system wisely. And then they have special advisors who are really, really good at it. If that’s the case and you can establish an energizing relationship between the minister, special advisor and the system – then you get very far (PS 7).

Most civil servants mention the benefits of having special advisors and describe how well the relationship works. However, a couple of permanent secretaries also commented on how the relationship with the special advisor does not always work out as hoped. Despite the best efforts, Permanent Secretary 5 explains that ‘part of the story is also that it sometimes works [the collaboration with the special advisor, AT] excellently, whereas it’s a little harder at other times’. Thus, the special advisor can end up in antagonistic relationship to the permanent civil service, which can complicate the collaboration:

You can get a special advisor who becomes kind of an opposition to the ordinary civil service. It’s really annoying when it gets like this. Therefore, it’s obviously important for me to make sure that it doesn’t turn out that way. And basically to ensure that it becomes a joint collaboration to help the minister and government as much as possible (PS 5)

While Permanent Secretary 5 emphasizes the special advisor’s potential antagonism towards the ministry as a reason why the collaboration might go awry, Permanent Secretary 3 points to the possibility of the permanent secretaries not being open to share the task of providing political advice with a special advisor.

It goes really well with the special advisors – I mean, in general. There are always things that go more or less well. But I also think that’s just a sign of how there used to be a monopoly on policy advice... (PS 3)

I have not discussed this matter in depth with all of my interviewees nor have I interviewed the special advisors. Yet my empirical material indicates an interesting dynamic between special advisors and the permanent civil service for exploration in future studies. For now, I will conclude that the relationships between permanent secretaries and special advisors are generally good, even though they can also be difficult at times. However, these difficulties do not seem to be caused by their role in general, but rather by factors such as personal chemistry. The skillset, network and personality of the special advisor can influence the relationship. The collaboration will also be highly influenced by the minister, who decides what the special advisor should do and is essential in setting the work atmosphere in the ministry.

SOME SPECIAL ADVISORS ARE BETTER THAN OTHERS. Some special advisor are closer to their minister. The permanent civil service is aware of this and tries to assess their relationship and to adjust their use of the special advisor accordingly. Several interviewees thus refer to ‘skillful special advisors’ or ‘well-connected special advisors’, which would logically imply that the opposite also exists. As Permanent Secretary 5 comments:

a good special advisor is close to his minister, and it can therefore often be a good way for me to get an idea of a case – to be able to talk to a well-connected special advisor if I can’t reach the minister (PS 5).

Besides the special advisor’s skill and network, personality is an important component in the relationship. The personalities of the special advisor and permanent secretary contribute to the chemistry between the two, and good chemistry is a great facilitator of collaboration. This is not to say that personal chemistry determines whether the permanent secretary can collaborate with the special advisor. Both groups act very professionally. But good chemistry can be a factor.

Well, throughout my time (...) I’ve only had positive experiences. Of course, just as we talked about with all others, there are always good and therefore more or less skilled [special advisors, AT]. Or some that you are more or less in sync with on a purely personal level (PS 3).

The permanent secretaries thus assess the strength of the special advisor, but they are also aware of their potential weaknesses.

10.3 Are special advisors here to stay?

A common phrase when asked about the special advisors was: ‘if they weren’t there, then we would have to invent them’ (PS 14). This almost seemed like a mantra in line with the bureaucratic virtues described in Code VII. This is noteworthy, because they also argue that there is substantial difference in what the special advisors actually do; partly determined by the minister, partly determined by the special advisor’s own skills and interests.

The main reason permanent secretaries and division heads give for the importance of special advisors is that they can do work and engage in party-political discussions that permanent secretaries cannot engage in as part of the permanent civil service.

it would be totally wild to be completely alone as a minister and not have someone with whom you can just close the door and talk party politics or whatever you need (HoD 13).

One permanent secretary even argues that the most skilled special advisors can raise the bar for the counsel in general, and the political counsel in particular:

So I've experienced extremely skilled special advisors who have lifted this house in relation to what we can do politically. (...) And I can *really* understand the ministers' demand for better advice on politics and to get someone closer who understands you better. What characterizes the special advisors is that they don't have 100 cases a week that they have to read. I'm weighed down by all sorts of other things (PS 10)

Some also voice their understanding of the minister's need for a special advisor with whom they can have party-political discussions. While I have not asked them about how many special advisors they think there should be, some permanent secretaries have mentioned this issue themselves. Thus, Permanent Secretary 3 argues that while some special advisors might be fine, it is important not to have too many of them due to the danger of too many cooks spoiling the broth:

I don't believe 'the more the better' – because then you'll also get in each other's way. But a couple, like we've experienced – it works really well and is of great benefit to the ministry (PS 3).

While Permanent Secretary 10 above talks in favour of the special advisors and expresses an understanding of the minister's need for special advisors, they also voice their concern regarding a complete separation of political and technical versus administrative counsel. The permanent secretary argues that the political and technical advice is closely related:

Basically, I think there's a lot that works really well, but I can easily understand the ministers' need to strengthen themselves with more than what one employee can handle. I'd be a little sad about a Swedish model, where the special advisors provide all the political advice, while the permanent secretaries are responsible for the area-specific expertise and administrative matters. And that's because it's all so closely related, I think (PS 10).

While the permanent secretary above says this very clearly, a similar opinion is expressed in several other interviews: namely, that political and technical/administrative advice is closely connected. An example of this is interest organizations lobbying through the special advisor and therefore less in touch with the permanent civil service – who are the ones with the technical, area-specific knowledge.

10.4 Conclusion

I have pointed out five aspects of the special advisor's job: being a party-political advisor; helping the minister with policy development, political-strategical thinking, and to avoid political pitfalls; communicating with external stakeholders; advising on communication; and ensuring that the ministry is focused on realizing the minister's agenda. The prioritization between the different aspects vary across ministries and is decided in collaboration between the special advisor and minister, albeit the minister's opinion is decisive.

In general, I found that the permanent secretary wants to collaborate with the special advisor and makes an effort to make the relation work. Some point to difficulties at times. However, these difficulties did not seem to be related to the role in general, but rather by factors such as personal chemistry, or the skillset, network and personality of the special advisor. Also several ministers and permanent secretaries both emphasize the benefits of teamwork. They point to the fact that special advisors can deliver advice on aspects of politics that is of limits for permanent secretaries. Thus, special advisors have an important function. Another interesting finding was that special advisors can also be used strategically by the permanent civil service who tries to prime the special advisors by giving them information that they might carry on to the minister. However, this also goes the other way around and special advisors also acts as a proxy for the minister's position. The special advisor might have knowledge that the permanent civil service does not, partly due to their close relationship with the minister. This can strengthen the overall counsel provided to the minister; both from the permanent civil service and the special advisor.

ANALYSIS PART 3: DOWNWARDS

Chapter 11.

Linking minister and ministry

The permanent secretary is the link between the administrative and political levels. In the ministerial hierarchy, the permanent secretary is the bottleneck between civil servants and the minister, which places the permanent secretary in a unique position; they are the person to introduce the minister to the ministry and vice versa. This chapter explains how this happens in practice and what it entails for the permanent secretary's everyday work.

11.1 Understanding the minister

Newly appointed ministers come with very different backgrounds in terms of their education, experience as a Member of Parliament (yes/no), management experience (yes/no), years of political experience, knowledge of the ministerial remit and much more. Moreover, the minister's personality and personal circumstances might affect their working habits. Thus, it is very important that the permanent secretary quickly gets to know the minister:

It means a lot, because ministers are just as different as everyone else. Their ways of tackling the job are different. And there you should like during the first – if not 20 minutes, then the first few days – tune in to what kind of a person has stepped through the door as your new boss (PS 16).

This is especially important because the permanent secretaries need to adjust the routines in the ministry to help the minister in their everyday life and in achieving their goals. In order to do so, the permanent secretary explains how they should help the minister make use of their advantages and compensate for their weaknesses:

All ministers have different interests, different political goals, they have different ways of working, and they have different strengths and weaknesses. Our job is to live up to what they want. It is to help them get the most out of their strengths and to compensate as best as possible for their weaknesses. That might sound banal, and it basically is. But it can have a major impact on the type of products to make and how to work (PS 5).

Hence, there are different aspects that permanent secretaries need to consider when 'tuning in' to their minister: the minister's goals, how they prefer to work, and the minister's strengths and weaknesses. In the following, I examine these three different aspects of a minister's persona that the permanent secretary must tune in to.

THE MINISTER'S GOALS. The permanent secretaries emphasize the importance of trying to grasp/understand the minister's line of thought. They stress that this is not merely about understanding the party-political angle on the ministry's remit but also to understand the appointed minister's angle on it. What are the new minister's priorities? As Permanent Secretary 2 says, they need to develop an understanding of this as soon as possible:

Do we understand the minister and their thoughts? The litmus test for a system like ours is, when a new minister arrives, that we switch to that minister and their preferences as quickly as we can. And it's not on the party political aspects alone – it's also on the person, because even within the parties there can be nuances about how you want it and what you prioritize. This is also a large area. So there are many corners in this area. You can do something about many things, and you can't do something about it all at once. So you just have to choose, 'Where do I want to leave my footprint?' And try to immerse yourself in it and understand it as quickly as possible (PS 2).

It is important to decode the minister's goals to figure out how to assist them to reach these goals. This encompasses understanding the minister's relative prioritization of their goals and figuring out whether to restructure the ministerial resources or reorganizing the ministry:

My very, very most important task in order to help the minister is to decode what they want, and then to help the minister to achieve those goals. And to decode how important this is for the minister. So there are many political goals that are overall political goals. (...) There's the overall goal that we're aiming for now – and then there are all sorts of other goals below that. But partly to find out: how far will the minister go to achieve his goals? How many battles will the minister take to achieve them? How much of the political capital we have does the minister want to invest? What is the hierarchy of their goals? So – what's most important, what comes next and what's not important enough to spend energy on? Because we also have limited resources, and even though a little bit comes in here and a little bit goes out there, a ministry has a limited capacity to reach political goals. And at the same time, you have to administrate all of the other stuff. So find out: How do I really set up my team to help the minister in the best possible way? (PS 7).

This should be done simultaneously with the daily management of the ministry. The permanent secretaries try to decode the minister during introductory meetings, but also through their other interactions with the minister, and sometimes even outside the ministry (e.g., by reading books authored by the minister). In short: 'I'm constantly trying to capture all of the minister's DNA' (PS 10). The permanent secretaries usually express intentions of having a longer initial talk about the minister's overall visions and ideas – disconnected

from handling the specific cases. For instance, Permanent Secretary 17 comments on her intentions:

One of the very first talks I had with the minister was about how we should make sure that we ate lunch together once in a while in the coming weeks so that we could talk about things other than specific cases. Just to be able to talk about the Minister's political project. What exactly are the minister's relations and priorities? Both within the party, within the government, and in relation to the other parties? What does the minister think? What does the minister really want to achieve? (...) What does the minister want to be remembered for? But really just to have a 'case-less' chat about her vision and mission as a minister (PS 17).

However, when everyday life hits the new minister and the permanent secretary, there is rarely time to sit down and engage in lengthy conversation about big thoughts and ideals:

We still haven't had that kind of lunch. But conversely, we have little drips of opportunities to start that talk. I think that's the right way. We're getting 'tuned in' to each other. To take those bigger talks that aren't about cases. And that everyday life is what it is, and it's therefore super difficult to carry out. That's a different story. But along the way, I think we've made it through (PS 17).

Instead, the permanent secretary must figure out the minister's take on a subject as they go along or when there is opportunity to have shorter talks. When it comes to the minister's opinion in specific cases, the permanent secretary can also go to the special advisor if the minister is preoccupied:

A good special advisor is close to his minister, and they can therefore be a good way for me to get an idea of a case – to be able to talk to a well-connected special advisor if I can't talk to the minister (PS 5).

Hence, this can speed up the process of getting to know the minister's preferences. For more about the role of the special advisors, see Chapter 10.

THE MINISTER'S EXPERIENCE. When a new minister is appointed, the civil service needs to brief the minister on the ministerial remit, on the work as minister and so much more – depending on the minister's prior experience. Thus, it makes a big difference whether the minister has experience from the Folketing, has experience as political spokesperson within the remit, has experience as a minister, or has management experience. Permanent Secretary 16 explains how they try to unfold the ministry nicely and slowly for the minister:

So I had that image – that what you have to do is as fast as possible, but at a sufficiently subdued pace so that the minister can keep up, start with the 'unpacking of the house'. Start with the minor things: Where's the coffee

machine, and where's your office?' It may take three minutes, but then slowly you start to add on: Who are the people? What are their functions? What are their tasks in a broad sense? And what are their defined tasks? And what exactly do you have to deal with? I think we had divided into three or four categories: 'Urgent, yesterday'. I mean, that wasn't what it was called. But you have to look at this now, you know? It's already down there in the political gift bag. That's the ministry you're taking over: You have to unpack it (PS 16).

But it is not done by slowly introducing the ministry to the minister. If the minister has no previous ministerial experience, they must also introduce the minister to the ministerial role. As Permanent Secretary 7 points out: 'There's a really big difference in how ministers, regardless of the formalities, experience and perceive their own role'. Hence, they need to manage the minister's expectations. One of the ministers also touches on this:

Then it's really a matter of making that thought clear to yourself and telling the permanent secretary what you want – and what you definitely don't want; things you want to spend time on and things you don't want to spend time on. (...) And it's about balancing expectations – which you have to spend as much time on as you can now that you're a minister. Whether you're a new minister coming to a system where everything is already in place or you're a minister who has to hire a new permanent secretary (M 1).

Depending on the minister's expectations regarding their own role and the role of the civil service, the permanent secretary must adjust their behaviour and actions. Several mention how this is difficult, because ministers use their civil service in different ways:

Something I think can be difficult is how ministers use the civil service very differently. Some ministers come in the door and understand that they're actually coming in and sitting in a real 'muscle car' that really, really can do something. If they're very intelligent as organizational leaders or as managers, then they also understand how to use the system wisely. And then they have special advisors who are really, really good at it. If that's the case and you can establish an energizing relationship between the minister, special advisor and the system – then you get very far (PS 7).

However, some ministers also refer to the difficulties in the encounter with an already established system and being expected to lead through a permanent secretary who is already the (administrative) leader of the ministry:

You can't prepare for what it's like to become a minister. Obviously, you've learned something from being an MP; nevertheless, it still comes as a total surprise. Because being a minister is something completely different. When you come in as a minister, there's a leader: the permanent secretary. So you actually get into an organization where there's a leader. But then **you** have to lead the

permanent secretary, and you have to lead the organization through the permanent secretary. That's a difficult exercise (M 6).

Hence, meeting one another and the subsequent balancing of expectations can be a demanding and difficult process for permanent secretary and minister alike.

ON TO THE NEXT. One of the challenges the civil service faces is how some ministers lack a basic understanding of ministerial procedures. Many politicians have little sense of the large amount of work required when they ask for analyses or implementation of policy. Concurrently, they sometimes forget that allocating many resources to a given political project takes away time from other ministry work. Various permanent secretaries thus communicate their struggle to get the minister to understand the bureaucratic process related to the enactment of policy. This is also why it is important to create a nuanced basis of for making decisions that outlines the consequences and costs. As Permanent Secretary 3 explains:

The general feeling, I think, across Slotsholmen is that the politicians think it's like this [snaps fingers] and then you've just made some huge reform which is analysed in advance, calculated and all sorts of risks have been applied. (...) And then you have this incredibly intensive negotiation process, where it's as though the perspective is like, the table where you're sitting with the policy as a minister or as an MP – it's the only table that exists for things to become reality: the negotiating table. But they underestimate the work that goes in before, the processing work after and the implementation work (PS 3).

This is the beginning of a longer quote on how politicians and ministers underestimate the process whereby written materials are prepared. Permanent Secretary 3 continues, stating that politicians' over-exploitation of the civil service entails a risk that policies will not be realized. The permanent secretary argues that the politicians must be more realistic about their ambitions:

And it isn't enough to make a proposal that has been nicely set up with some attractive pictures or a bill that has been passed. It's just not. That doesn't make things happen in reality. I mean – that kind of over-exploitation – that one thinks that all of the resources in the divisions should only be spent on that one thing... it's a risk factor for the political projects. So you simply have to have a more realistic level of ambition for how much you want to achieve in too little time. Otherwise you end up with none of it becoming reality (PS 3).

Hence, several permanent secretaries point to the importance of helping the minister to adjust their expectations of what is realistic to manage in a ministry within a specific period of time.

ADJUSTING THE INTERNAL PROCEDURES TO THE MINISTER. When a new minister arrives, the civil service needs to adjust their routines and case material to them. The permanent secretaries try to ensure that the civil service adjusts their services to the new minister. This adjustment is an important part of ensuring the ‘survival’ of the minister and is necessary because being a minister is a very demanding job.

Some ministers want it one way, others want it another way. And it’s not because any one way is right or bad or good. It’s just because we’re different people. So you have to... for a minister, it’s such a hard job they have. It’s so ungrateful, it’s really wild. If the minister is to have a chance to survive, then you have to make sure to sweep away everything that wastes the minister’s energy while the minister is in power and which can disrupt them in relation to their project. It can be so completely impractical in terms of whether you fill their calendar with all sorts of meaningless things, so they never ever have time to deal with the big things (PS 3).

As Permanent Secretary 3 argues, different adjustments must be made to ensure that the minister can focus their time and energy on their political project and not just spend time on day-to-day management and worrying about trifling details, such as when to leave for a meeting in town.

First, the adjustment regards practical details, such as when the minister prefers to have meetings, whether they want to spend a lot of time outside the ministry, or whether they live far away from the ministry.

After all, everyday life is completely re-adjusted, to a large extent, around the new minister. Some live in Jutland, some don’t. Some prioritize having one set day a week where they’re actually being out with the voters and reality. Others don’t. Some also have small children and have to go home at a certain time and will not be disturbed afterwards – and then you have to plan accordingly, rightly so. It can also help to discipline the system. There are vastly different types. Some people pull the plug on weekends and holidays and say: ‘Now I reckon I’ll only hear from you if something is completely wrong’. Others are constantly keeping up and have ideas and proverbial balls that they have to pick up. It’s very different. Widely different (PS 3).

The permanent secretaries must therefore adjust the routines of the everyday ministry life so it fits the new minister’s personal circumstances.

Second, the permanent secretary also needs to match the minister’s expectation to the written materials produced in the ministry. There are a lot of written materials in a minister’s everyday life: covers, briefs, policy dossiers, speeches, notes, memos, minutes, files etc. The permanent secretary needs to figure out how the minister prefers to receive such text, the amount of detail,

how much text the minister wants to read and so forth. As Permanent Secretary 18 says:

Ministers differ. It is challenge every time a new minister is appointed. What is the new minister like? How does the minister want the material and cases to be presented?(PS 18).

Thus, the permanent secretary needs to figure out what types of documents the minister prefers. This includes whether the minister wants visual presentations, deep briefs, short or long briefs etc. One permanent secretary recounted an episode, where they misjudged the minister's working habits and sent a large pile of written material for the minister to read over the course of their vacation. The minister had laughed and measured the height of the pile. This material was too comprehensive and detailed for that particular minister. Hence, the permanent secretary must be able to figure out how the minister reads written materials: does the minister want details or do they expect a broader overview? Permanent Secretary 11 also explains how the minister's preference for detail versus overview usually evolves over time:

And the ministers clearly have different needs and desires regarding precision. And they also change over time. In the beginning, they want to get down into the detail. Then they're reading the details and are interested in a broader range of cases. And then at some point they may prioritize in terms of what to look at really thoroughly – and they don't need to see. And there are different ministers and different interests. And that's just fine, and we adapt to that (PS 11).

The quote also illustrates how the minister's interests and needs change during their period as minister, meaning that the permanent secretary must also continuously adjust the written material they are feeding to the minister.

Third, some ministers prefer to have materials presented orally. This means that the permanent secretary has many more meetings with the minister – often every day to keep up with the briefs and policy dossiers. During such meetings, the permanent secretary presents the case to the minister, and the minister has opportunity to ask follow-up questions immediately. Often, the permanent secretary is able to answer such questions on the spot. Should that not be the case, they can promise to get back with an answer before or at the next meeting. If the minister is happy with the file, speech, policy dossier and so forth, they can approve it in the system.

But that completely changes the game. Do you get someone who really wants to read cases and who understand them? I've also tried a minister – and that's perfectly fine – who said: 'I would like my cases to be presented orally, because I simply can't read all those pages'. It's a completely different way of working. Then you [as permanent secretary, AT.] have to read all the cases all the time, thinking, 'Now I have to go in and present them in two minutes. Or in thirty

seconds'. And these are big, complex cases. (...) So that's how we would sit and run cases by some ministers orally: 'Here's an answer to someone who has complained about resources, and you can't go into the case, and it says such and such' – and then a signature. And then there's a difficult Finance Committee case about [the minister's flagship case] – where we're on the case right now is such and such... You can then spend five minutes on that, and then: signature (PS 24).

As Permanent Secretary 24 explains, a minister's preference for oral presentations affects how the permanent secretary reads and prepares the cases, because they do not only need to be prepared for questions, but also to present the case orally.

LITTLE THINGS THAT MAKE THE WORLD GO ROUND. The permanent secretaries are very clear on the fact that their minister's routines and preferred routines are defining for how the civil service serves the minister. Thus, the permanent secretary asks the minister: 'How can we make some kind of framework so that you function in the best possible way as minister?' (PS 1). While the permanent secretary is responsible for the organization accommodating the minister's general needs, the minister's personal secretaries handle many of the specific practicalities regarding the minister's everyday life:

Is it tea or coffee? What kind of cup? And when in the day would you like it? What font size do we publish in? What order should the speakers be in? How early should we get to the meetings? And have control of the logistics. Those aren't the kinds of things the Minister or I need to spend time on. It just needs to work (PS 2).

How do they want to be helped personally? Some like very detailed notes. Some like oral presentations. Some need coffee in the morning. How would they like the meeting table set up for a spokespersons meeting? What makes a person function in everyday life is a fairly large system in a ministry, of course. But I'm the one responsible for the set up being made (PS 1)

While the permanent secretary is responsible for arranging the organizational set-up to assist the minister, many people are required to assist the minister in their everyday work. The secretariat consists of secretaries and other employees who assist with many important tasks in the minister's everyday life. This includes, but is not limited to, rescheduling meetings for the 117th time, setting the table for meetings, bringing fresh coffee, bringing lunch, showing the minister to a meeting room, keeping track of their papers, iPads and personal belonging between meetings, copying materials, ensuring that they leave for meetings at the right time (not too early!), handling political spokespersons, taking notes, and passing on conclusions from meetings. Just to mention a few things.

GIVE AND TAKE – MAKE IT WORK. In general, the permanent secretaries try to accommodate their minister's wishes. This means that there will be an interruption of the ministry's activities or at least a delay, when the new minister and ministry are being calibrated, as Permanent Secretary 1 explains:

if you [as minister, AT] are trying us out, does that mean a break in the ministry's work? Yes and no. Of course it means a break, because we actually spend some energy on, a lot of energy... We need to – to be able to find out: How are we going to set ourselves up so that we can help you, as minister, in the best possible way? (PS 1).

While the permanent secretary tries to accommodate the new minister's wishes, the permanent secretary is also responsible for politely objecting if some demands and wishes cannot be met. It is therefore the permanent secretary who asks the minister to find a compromise regarding the work procedure if it is deemed necessary, as Permanent Secretary 16 explains:

You have to find out how the new minister works, and then you have to adjust how the ministry works according to the new one. If there are any inconveniences, then of course as permanent secretary it's also your responsibility to say, 'Could you do...?' or 'Should we try to calibrate so that we adjust a little bit from both sides?' But basically it's the minister's form of work that is defining for how the house should serve the minister (PS 16).

As the permanent secretary mentions above, it is ultimately the minister's preferred practice that guides all of the work in the ministry.

It means *a lot*. It means all sorts of things, on the practical level. The last minister we had, she liked to hold many evening meetings. The new minister doesn't like that. That means I'm home in the evening. I wasn't in my old life. The former minister liked to see one type of information, which the current minister is not necessarily so preoccupied with. So, the cases are being fitted in a certain way (PS 24).

It is not only their work habits that dictate the functioning of the ministry; some ministers also want to change the organization of the ministry, such as creating new secretariats, to support their work.

Then you also have to be told that the minister doesn't just sit down and carry on where the previous minister left it, because then the minister comes in with a lot of expectations about what's going to happen. Politically, but also organizationally. There are some places where the organization has been arranged differently. From the beginning, making changes to the close secretarial service and so on. You also have to engage in dialogue about this fairly quickly, so we can get it adjusted (PS 16).

This is also a point to which the permanent secretaries pay attention, so they can make adjustments if needed. Hence, all of the permanent secretaries were willing to go to great lengths to make the relationship run smoothly. They tell of how they try to accommodate the minister's preferred work habits and preferences in general. This takes a lot of focus in the beginning, because it needs to be established to some degree before the real work can begin:

So my main focus has also been to make it work upwards. Because it has to work. If not – then you'll never get anywhere. So you have to get that in place (PS 15).

This is not only the permanent secretaries' point of view; some ministers also seem to expect this adjustment to happen; that is, that the permanent secretaries will ensure that minister and permanent secretary are on the same page:

What's important to me with my permanent secretaries is that they are skilled and hardworking – and they are. But it's also important that they're sociable and that they are at eye level. Not so much at eye level with me, because they'll make sure of that, but more on eye level with those whom they are to lead (M1).

In the quote above, the minister also emphasizes the permanent secretary's diligence as important. This leads to the final point in this chapter; namely, that permanent secretaries work many hours in this position as the link between ministry and minister. The permanent secretaries are continuously oriented upwards to the minister to ensure that they are getting the assistance, written materials, and professional feedback they require. At the same time, the permanent secretary is oriented downward to the remaining civil service to ensure that they assist the minister in the best possible way, to guarantee the quality of the material and so forth. In the following paragraph, I will elaborate on how this balancing act renders the permanent secretary's schedule rather unpredictable.

11.2 The uncontrollable calendar

UNCONTROLLABLE CALENDAR. The permanent secretaries have a very unpredictable working day. In the following, I will point out two things: the volatility of their calendar and the never-ending working hours.

First, the permanent secretary's calendar depends on their minister's calendar. As mentioned in Chapter 6, the minister's work habits can vary substantially: Some are morning people and prefer morning meetings. Others may prefer evening meetings, in which case the permanent secretary must adjust their workday. Permanent Secretary 15 emphasizes how the minister's calendar and the inexhaustible flow of cases in the system control her days:

You're hanging there in a string and there are always some cases: tick, tick, tick, tick. And it's always the minister's calendar that's in control (PS 15).

This also becomes visible in the quote below, where one permanent secretary tells of how she had 32 days (often unexpected) with evening work during a four-month period.

You can never count on your calendar. You control almost nothing in your own calendar. You're the top boss, [but] you're one of the few top bosses in the world who can't control your own calendar. So in the second half of 2020, I believe it was, September to December, I think I had 32 evening meetings here and evening negotiations. And they were the kind that emerge in the morning – and you've otherwise just promised the family that you're there today (PS 10).

Hence, one's family life is often affected by this unpredictable schedule. More permanent secretaries talk about their jobs as a position consisting of several full-time positions. This also explains why it consumes so many hours a week:

You have many full-time jobs. Being an advisor to the minister is a full-time job. Being the head of such a ministry here – that's a full-time job. You join a government committee – sitting on a steering group is very time demanding. That you just throw on top. It has surprised me (PS 10).

Second, permanent secretaries basically work all hours, and there is always something more you can do: 'Well, it's endless. You can easily work 100 hours/week. There are a few who think it's fun, but there are very few who think it's really fun for a long time. I mean – I didn't work 100 hours in my last job – not very often, at least' (PS 8). This 'work around the clock'-approach also means that permanent secretaries are (almost) always available. Because they quickly turn into the bottleneck between civil service and minister, they are often in demand. This means they can get calls and texts 24 hours a day, also during the weekend and on vacation. One permanent secretary also notes that taking one night off during the week means that you fall behind in your daily work:

It's not an eight-to-four job. So, I spend all my waking hours... that is, most of my time working. And you just have to know that before you take this kind of a job. And I knew it beforehand: that it was an excruciatingly hard job. And if you for any reason stop one evening and think you need to have some free time, then you're going to be behind (PS 11).

I want to remark that several permanent secretaries explicitly noted that I should not feel sorry for them and that these are simply the conditions. However, some also noted that even though they had previously worked in close proximity to permanent secretaries, they were nevertheless surprised by the workload and the hours that the job demands of you:

It's a very, very demanding job. It's far more demanding than anything I've tried before. It's more demanding than I thought. It's very demanding in terms of how much you have to be able to attend to all the time. It's very, very demanding in terms of time. So you work many, many, many hours. 70–80 hours every week. Every weekend. Every night. If you have one night at the cinema, then you are completely 'sent back to Go' [i.e., as in Monopoly] when you get home (PS 10).

There are differences in the workload from ministry to ministry and during the year; for instance, there will usually be longer work days in the ministry during negotiations. However, during my fieldwork, I was usually at the ministry between 8am and 6pm, and so were the permanent secretaries. Some days they arrived earlier, as when there were morning negotiations. Other days they stayed later, such as when there were negotiations in the evening. Regardless, they spent most evenings processing cases and communicating with the minister.

11.3 Conclusion

Adjusting a ministry to a new minister is time-consuming and requires considerable amounts of a permanent secretary's energy. Different factors, such as the minister's experience and work habits affect how the civil servants are to go about their work. For example, the minister's previous experience (e.g., as an MP, political spokesperson within the remit, or as manager), affects their ability to act as manager, and therefore also affects how much introduction, guidance and support they require from the permanent secretary in the beginning. Moreover, ministers (regardless of experience) enter their position with different expectations to the civil service. Hence, the permanent secretary must be able to figure out what these more or less explicit expectations are to ensure that the ministry is tailored accordingly. The permanent secretaries are very focused on serving the minister's needs; at the same time, they must attend to the minister (upwards) and to the civil service (downwards). This often results in very lengthy and unpredictability workdays, because the minister's calendar usually trumps everything else.

Chapter 12.

Managing the ministry

Permanent secretaries are the managers of a large organization: a ministry. They are therefore responsible for ensuring that the ministry can help the minister realize their policy objectives while also administering the existing laws. The following chapter concerns how the permanent secretary fulfils this role. I elaborate on how permanent secretaries handle the day-to-day management of the ministry and how some permanent secretaries delegate various shares of the responsibility for the daily management to the division heads. An example of this is the establishment of a board of managers. I will elaborate on how work is conducted in these managing boards, including what they discuss and how the permanent secretary still has the final word – even though some strive to find common solutions. The chapter examines some of the differences between being permanent secretary and head of division, which is first and foremost about the differences in responsibility and degree of authority. Finally, it describes an ever-changing and hectic everyday life, where changes happen quickly and managing the ministry is rarely prioritized over the minister.

12.1 Ensure a strong organization

RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MINISTRY. As mentioned in Chapter 12, the minister has the formal responsibility for the ministry as an organization. However, ministers usually delegate this responsibility to the permanent secretary:

Formally, the minister is responsible for the entire ministry. Also for the operations. But in practice, most ministers – the ones I have been permanent secretary for – have said: ‘You take care of that’. That’s how they concentrate on the political. When there are major decisions (e.g. finances), then it’s something you discuss with the minister. I’ve also made organizational changes and I also talk to the minister about (...) so that they’re involved and have opportunity to express their opinion. Otherwise I take care of it (PS 8).

As Permanent Secretary 8 mentions here, important decisions are discussed with the minister, and the minister is kept informed of organizational changes. Overall, however, managing the ministry is the permanent secretary’s responsibility. The permanent secretaries emphasize the importance of having the ministry’s organization and day-to-day management under control because it could otherwise take attention and time away from policy development:

When there’s no control over the operations, then that’s the only thing it’s going to be about politically. That is, if there’s no control over the operations, then you

can't make policy. We control the operations, the minister makes policy. That's what she's here for (PS 10).

While the permanent secretary is responsible for the daily management, several division heads question whether the permanent secretary can devote time and energy to developing the organization on top of their close relationship with the minister:

The permanent secretary is the CEO – someone who in fact also is and should be responsible for how we develop the organization. And sometimes I can just see that they just don't have the time and energy for that – if you read cases and review cases with the minister all the time. So it's almost inhuman to imagine that the permanent secretary can also have the time and energy needed for organizational development (HoD 3).

In the following, I will elaborate on how the daily management of the ministry works in practice to shed light on how much the permanent secretaries contribute to developing the ministry as an organization.

REORGANIZING. When appointed, the permanent secretaries often make some changes to the structure of the organization. The reasoning behind such organizational change varies: Some want to encourage collaboration across the ministry (instead of a very silo'ed, division-oriented thinking), some want to rethink the division of labour between department and agency, while others want to get rid of an unhealthy culture; just to mention a few of the reasons. The changes of division of labour and structure were often argued to be carried out in a bid to enhance efficiency and responsiveness towards the minister:

I took all the tasks that are closely linked to ministerial service and policy formulation into the department. Because it was inefficient and it got bad, because those cases started out in the agencies and there was simply too far [To the political level, AT]. And we had lots of things going back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. And it's important with those things that there are people sitting close to the minister and also sitting close to me (PS 8).

The procedure also varied: some ministers are involved in the reorganization process, while other such processes were mainly in collaboration with the division heads. One of the ministers explains their involvement as follows:

We have been through an organizational change since I became minister, where we have organized the department according to the tasks we have to take care of (...) And clearly the permanent secretary has been the prime mover behind that work, implemented it and had the responsibility for it and everything else. But it isn't something that has taken place without me having been involved as well (M 11).

Another minister explains how they prefer not being involved in organizational restructuring, instead leaving this to the permanent secretary alone.

I simply try to avoid interfering in how my permanent secretaries arrange their organization and how... who they will have to sit on which posts and so on. The system becomes theirs (M 12).

Hence, there are many different ways to conduct the reorganization. I also want to emphasize that not all permanent secretaries conduct such organizational restructuring, and some are done out of necessity as a result of the reshuffling of ministerial remits (as decided by the Prime Minister). However, it still seemed to happen quite regularly, even though the permanent secretaries also recognized that the organizations must have time to adjust to the last changes.

APPOINTING YOUR TEAM. The vast majority of the permanent secretaries stress the importance of having the right combination of heads of divisions. They emphasize the importance of having a variety of skills in the division-head group; division heads who can provide professional advice to the minister and carry out the minister's initiatives:

Then it's extremely important that you can set a team. That you have a circle of division heads, a circle of heads of management, which in one way or another can cover the permanent secretary, but also the minister. It is important in relation to making a basis for making decisions and executing on the policy that is to be implemented. (...) ¹⁴ The team that is set around the permanent secretary, but ultimately also the minister, in relation to professional and technical counsel – it's important. Because you're not a one-man army. It's impossible. It's completely impossible (PS 14)

On top of that, I encountered several permanent secretaries who had a head of division (or the head of unit for the ministerial secretariat) as their discussion partner. This meant that the division head read most of the cases that the permanent secretary read (i.e., more than merely the cases concerning their own division). This enabled them to approach the permanent secretary's information across the entire ministerial remit, qualifying them to discuss the content with the permanent secretary with a broader perspective than the other division heads.

IN THE LONG RUN. The permanent secretary is responsible for ensuring that the ministry can support the minister in the long run. The civil servants should be able to accommodate the needs of both current and future ministers, as well

¹⁴ Details about the heads of divisions have been removed.

as to accommodate both the current and future challenges within the ministerial remit. Thus, it is necessary to optimize the organization and resource consumption:

Then the strategic planning must work. One thing is that we must do what the minister is asking for today, tomorrow and next week, but we must also be ready to deliver on things that we anticipate the current minister – or another minister or another government – will need in 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 years. And there are many of the things we work with that are very long-term. So it's about somehow helping the current minister or a future minister with the expectations of what the need will be (PS 5).

As the permanent secretary explains above, the focus on the long run is important, because projects often take a long time to implement. One of the permanent secretaries explains that it can be very difficult to assert time and focus to long term planning of the ministry's development, because current cases consume all her time. Thus, some permanent secretaries explain that it is important to implement different tools to help them focus on the long-term planning – both in terms of what happens in two weeks, two months, and two years.

You're quickly sucked into a pile of very concrete cases. Then you lose track. You lose sense of the breadth. You lose the planning horizon. So part of what I took with me into the ministry was to make a system to ensure an increased focus on how we could manage our cases: Did we have insight into how well we could deliver? How good were we at delivering on deadlines? How good were we at getting cases sent out on time? And that with having a long-term horizon on things, typically because we have some development tasks and some analysis, and then we have the operations – very tight operational tasks. And we typically tend to just solve all the short-term and the operations, and next week we have to do this and that and that. But then we forget the long-term (PS 11).

Thus, the permanent secretaries make an effort to focus on the long-term perspectives in the ministries and not be completely absorbed in the daily challenges, which easily takes up an entire work day.

12.2 Day-to-day management

THE MINISTRY AS SMOOTH-RUNNING MACHINE. Some permanent secretaries find it interesting and exciting to run the ministry, such as Permanent Secretary 5:

I find it incredibly exciting to work with getting an organization to work effectively. And I was only really allowed to try that once I was given responsibility as permanent secretary (PS 5).

Unfortunately, many permanent secretaries find it difficult to devote time to this, because they spend so much of their time focusing upwards to assist the minister:

There are not many hours a day for organizational development and, basically, taking care of your organization because of your time-consuming interactions with the political level (PS 17)

Several permanent secretaries share that they really want to devote more energy into the daily management of the organization, but simply do not think they can find the time and energy to do so:

It's actually part of what I would like more time and energy to channel in the direction of. But it just isn't there (PS 15).

Usually, they delegate the task of the daily management and the development of the organization to one of the division heads.

It's also crucial that the permanent secretary receives help for some of the other roles. So, for example, the role of being the ministry CEO. You can't outsource it all, but, you can also see it across Slotsholmen, that in many places you have a department manager who is responsible for: group management, finance, the management of the agencies. So you can get help with a lot of things (HoD 7).

Conversely, some permanent secretaries claim that they insist on finding time for this work:

You simply have to make sure that you take the time to engage in more than just the political counsel. And that's actually something I also said in my employment interview when I became permanent secretary. That I would insist on that. That it might not be me who attended all the meetings, but then the minister had to trust that I had some people who could participate, because I had taken the time to get the right team and to create a well-functioning. It's not easy, but I just think – there's nothing that does it for you. Then you just have to be able to do it yourself (PS 9).

Hence, there were different priorities across ministries, and while the ministry size and hierarchy was a good proxy, it was not in itself sufficient to predict the degree of delegation of daily management.

LEADER. The permanent secretary is leading the ministry and plays an important part in setting the direction of the ministry.

We have such talented people. And they can do so much themselves, but I have to be their leader. I'm the sun they look up to, and I'm the one who gives the speech at the Christmas party. I have to be a skilled leader for my managers [division heads AT]. And I lead through really, really talented

managers. But they're also people who really put a lot of hours of their lives [into their work, AT] (PS 10).

Permanent Secretary 17 emphasizes how they, as permanent secretary, play a bigger part in deciding the ministry's direction than they had as head of division. Despite the executive board (in Danish, *direktionen*), which includes the division heads, also playing a large part in deciding the direction of the ministry:

Obviously, you have a completely different opportunity to set the direction. There's a huge difference. Although division heads should also, in principle, have a very, very large management space, one must acknowledge this, and it's only afterwards that one thinks that the direction has been very set. It isn't necessarily just the permanent secretary who sets it. Then there's the management as a collective that may set it on some points, the minister who sets it and so on. But the reality is, when the minister has set a direction, the permanent secretary has set a direction, when the management has set some direction – then maybe in reality, retrospectively, then there might not really be that terribly much direction left for the head of division himself to set. There, you get a much more direct influence on the direction when you're permanent secretary (PS 17).

Setting a direction and communicating your vision and strategy is very important, because sudden changes can occur due to cabinet reshuffles. This can lead to unexpected shifts in the prioritization within the ministry – civil servants might have to rethink their projects or at least adjust them to a new minister:

A really good permanent secretary also manages to get the whole ministry involved in the current visions. Which change extremely abruptly in our world, because one day we move one way and the next day we have to move the other way (HoD 10).

Additionally, several division heads point to the permanent secretary as a central figure regarding the creation of a good work environment and culture in the ministry:

What kind of leader you have – that means everything in an organization. Culture starts at the top. So it makes a huge difference in the culture (HoD 12).

During my fieldwork, I also encountered several permanent secretaries giving talks at introduction meetings and other types of courses for the permanent civil servants. Excerpt 12.1 illustrates a permanent secretary who tells about the ministry's vision to the civil servants at an introductory meeting. The permanent secretary focuses on the broader lines regarding the ministry and talks about serving democracy and permanent secretary's visions for the ministry.

Excerpt 12.1. Introductory meeting for new employees

There is an introductory meeting for new employees in the ministry, where the permanent secretary gives a presentation. Here, the permanent secretary talks about their vision for the ministry, among other things: that the ministry must support the government's goals and that the minister has the democratic mandate and legitimacy. In addition, the ministry must be responsible for highly qualified problem solving. The ministry represents the minister externally, so the ministry must think the minister into everything they do. (...)

MANAGER. The permanent secretary is officially the manager of the ministry. The permanent secretary is responsible for ensuring that the day-to-day-tasks are solved with a high degree of professional quality:

One of the most important tasks is to ensure that the basic ministry operations are in order. Basically so that the minister should not be disturbed with it. It just has to work. And it's everything from case processing to things running in the agencies without too many mistakes, without the budgets slipping, without the piles exploding, or that the satisfaction among those who use it goes sideways... to a department where the things a minister needs – case preparation and so on – that it must run and be of high professional quality. So the basic operations must work (PS 5).

Several interviewees point to the importance of this function and the importance of practice; being able to pass policy in the Folketing is not enough. It must be something that can be administrated in practice:

It's a huge value chain that must run. It doesn't matter that the minister wants something if we subsequently can't get it out and make it work. So it's that value chain that must be able to run. (...) Right from having a political goal that we can meet with some legislation to being able to administrate it – and living up to the objectives (PS 14).

However, several permanent secretaries mention how it is difficult to devote time to the daily management of the ministry (i.e., downwards in the ministry), because they devote so much time focusing on the minister (upwards in the ministry). Several permanent secretaries describe this in terms of having multiple full-time jobs.

The minister is a politician and a minister, and he's the head of administration. And for good reason, ministers will tend to have, to put it mildly, 80% of their attention focused on the politics. That's what they have been elected to do. And so it must be. And there I must, in addition to the fact that I must also have as many percent directed in the direction as the minister has, then I must exceed

100%, because I must then also focus on the other part [the operation of the ministry, AT] (PS 16).

Hence, it is important for the permanent secretaries to ensure that the ministry is organized and ready to handle the minister's requests. The permanent secretary should therefore assemble the best possible team of senior civil servants:

I need to have a relatively strong set up around me, also in terms of helping with corporate governance. Because I spend a relatively small part of my time on it – it will probably be different from what you would usually see from top managers (...) who spend a relatively larger part of their time, as far as I can see, on managing their organization, getting up on the soap box, are out talking to employees and so on. I spend a relatively small part of my time looking at what business leaders would probably normally do, because being a permanent secretary is very minister-oriented (PS 2).

The permanent secretary is aware of how they have less time to manage the ministry relative to the time other top managers spend on their organization. Still, some permanent secretaries insist that they need to be involved in managing the ministry:

It demands that you insist on having time for it. And to have a 'management space' to be able to lead the organization, because it simply doesn't work if you don't. And don't have time to talk with your bosses so that you know they know what you're thinking and what the minister is thinking, and how we get on with this and that (PS 9).

Another permanent secretary also emphasize how they prioritize having recurring meetings with agency heads to be familiar with the challenges, development and tasks they have planned:

I have recurring meetings where we just discuss: what are the challenges in that part of the ministry? What kind of plans are there for the coming time and the development in the different corners of the ministry? So it's both on the more developmental level and on the completely low-practical, operational level: What's going on around in the ministry? (PS 17).

Excerpt 12.2 is an encounter between the permanent secretary and an agency head. The permanent secretary is chairing this meeting, but when discussing details, the permanent secretary is for the most part listening to the discussion between the agency head and the head of division. When conversation falls on the minister's opinion, however, the head of division looks to the permanent secretary. This excerpt illustrates a permanent secretary who takes an interest in the agency.

Excerpt 12.2. Status meeting with agency director

The permanent secretary enters the room. The other meeting participants are already sitting at the table. The agency director is accompanied by three officials, whereas the ministry is represented by the permanent secretary, two division heads and the permanent secretary's secretary. The permanent secretary sits down and immediately asks how things are going while looking questioningly at the agency employees sitting on the other side of the table. The agency director answers the question and describes the challenges they are facing. The permanent secretary replies that the department is aware of these matters, and that it is difficult to find out how 'we' best get through it. The permanent secretary asks about some of the initiatives that have been implemented in the past. The agency director and the head of division engage in a discussion of the concrete initiatives, while the permanent secretary sits back in his chair with his fingers against each other. After a bit of talking back and forth, the head of division says that it is probably about something political and therefore depends on whether the government can identify with it. The head of division looks questioningly at the permanent secretary. The permanent secretary speaks up, asking if the proposal has been run by the minister, to which the head of division replies that it is something the minister is adamant about. (...)

On top of having meetings with the agency management, I also observed meetings with entire units (i.e., head of unit and all the administrative officers) within the department. However, the fieldwork also illustrated that this type of meeting was the first to be moved if something unexpected occurred. Hence, one meeting with a unit had been moved several times before finally being carried out in the week I was there. This indicates that the permanent secretaries strive to be present in the organization, but also that it is not easy to make ends meet.

MEETINGS IN THE 'BOARD OF MANAGERS. Many permanent secretaries argue that they manage the ministry through the board of managers. The board of managers usually refers to the permanent secretary and the division heads, but sometimes the agency heads and/or the head of unit for the ministry's secretariat also participate:

I make a lot out of the fact that the ministry is run by an board of managers. Although I may be the top link in the pyramid, I can't do it without having that space where we make decisions together (PS 16).

They have regular meetings where they discuss many different aspects of managing the ministry and assisting the minister. This includes, but is not limited to, discussing the minister's vision and ideas, discussing the employees in the

ministry (salary, well-being etc.), what is trending in the agencies etc. While there were obviously differences from ministry to ministry, both when I asked during interviews and during field work, this head of division mentions many of the recurring themes:

It's basically about: how do we operate and develop the group that we are? What are our core values? What are we looking for? We take a stand on stakeholder analysis, take a stand on everything about running an enterprise. Coordination across the divisions. It's basically about running the enterprise, but also about how we prepare the minister and we have, and the minister has, a well-functioning ministry. We meet weekly for meetings where we have agenda items, where we figure out our position on things, how we should make sure that people are prepared to carry out their tasks, coordination regarding pay, and coordination around basic principles for how we lead and so on (HoD 12).

The regular meetings have multiple purposes. First, the permanent secretary usually has information that is useful for the heads of the divisions. This could be information from meetings with the minister, preparatory government committees, or from assisting the minister in negotiations:

I run the group, but I do a *lot* of that at the board meetings with input from the division heads. They're the ones who help me. And that's, among other things, why they're here: they help me to run the group wisely. And then I'm the political link – to constantly knowing what's going on in the hallways. I'm extremely well-connected on this island. I always know what's going on, and I'm trying to make the division heads part of it. It makes their jobs easier (PS 10).

Another important function is to share knowledge across divisions, because some knowledge might tap into several parts of the ministry. This ensures that the permanent secretary has information about what is going on in the ministry, but also that the division heads can get to know more about their colleagues' areas of responsibility:

There is also some value in thinking about the in-house coherence. That one hears what's happening in other parts of the ministry. Because something that goes on in one division actually sometimes regards the other division. (...) So it's also for knowledge-sharing throughout the ministry (PS 16).

The permanent secretary can also benefit from such meetings to get feedback on ideas and to have professional/technical discussions with the division heads. Several permanent secretaries and division heads mention this:

I use my division heads as management; i.e., in relation to running the organization and driving change in it. To make some of the big decisions. And it's also a way for me to qualify some of my ideas, so I'm not sitting completely alone with them. But also to get an idea of whether I'm on the right path.

Whether we're on the right path. It's also an important job. I think it varies between the different ministries, how much the circle of division heads is an board of managers and how much more you are a place where you exchange information (PS 5).

In general, the division heads who are part of this board of managers really appreciate their discussions, the collaboration, and how they are challenged:

Then we also have a function in being each other's sparring partners and challenging each other: 'I think that that's a bigger problem than you think it is' or 'I'm not as worried about that as you are'. So, to help each other see where the challenges are. Where is the world moving? Where is the parliamentary majority headed? Where is the minister's position on the cases? When the minister has given that type of feedback on the case – that may have a connection to your cases, no? (...) Very close cooperation is important, because there's a kind of cyclical effect when it comes to legislation (HoD 11).

Most of the division heads pointed to this collaboration and referred to the equal participation in these meetings. But at the end of the day, the permanent secretary has the final say when disagreements emerge:

We don't hold democracy [in the board of managers, AT]. But we discuss things, and in most cases we can do it reasonably openly and honestly. And then I'm making a decision whether we do it one way or the other (PS 5).

Hence, permanent secretaries delegate a lot of the daily management of the ministry. But if there is disagreement within the board of managers or someone needs to make an authoritative decision, the permanent secretary has the final say.

OPEN DOOR POLICY. Many permanent secretaries talked about their 'open door' policy, which I also encountered during my field work. This entails that when the permanent secretary is in their office, the division heads can come by to discuss specific cases or general strategies with the permanent secretary without booking a formal meeting. While some questions turn into longer discussions or result in the planning of further meetings, some are also questions that can be settled quite quickly. Such encounters often last less than two minutes. While they interrupt the permanent secretary's case processing, lunch or something similar, they help the heads of divisions to process cases quicker. Excerpt 12.3 is an example of an unplanned and short encounter between the permanent secretary and head of division. The head of division comes to the permanent secretary to ask a couple of questions that the permanent secretary answers. This leads to a brief discussion of another case before the head of division leaves the room.

Excerpt 12.3. Open door policy

A head of division enters the permanent secretary's office. The head of division says that he is submitting a briefing (*orienteringssag*) to the minister, and asks about which format he should prepare another case in. The permanent secretary asks if they should not also make it into a briefing. The head of division states that this can easily be done, but asks if it is not one case too many for the minister to see. However, the permanent secretary believes that it is important for the minister to know some of the details and argues there should be a briefing for the minister. The head of division nods and walks away.

Several permanent secretaries point to this procedure as more effective than processing written comments back and forth

The collaboration wasn't bad when I arrived. In many ways, there was a good, very friendly culture. People talked nicely to one another. But people talked far too little together and it was very formal. People sent cases back and forth, but they didn't talk together enough about the substance (PS 8).

Upon beginning in the ministry, the permanent secretary did not find that the civil servants were discussing the substance of the matter sufficiently. Accordingly, this led to cases being sent back and forth in the system instead of problems simply being discussed up front.

STRONG HIERARCHY. The ministries are characterized by a very clear hierarchy. This hierarchy permeates the work procedures and, among other things, the system should ensure that the ministries produce thoroughly prepared material for the minister. Sometimes, however, the hierarchy can have unintended consequences. For instance, I encountered administrative officers who seemed very nervous when called to the permanent secretary's office (e.g., trembling hands, shifty eyes) to clarify the reasons behind the recommendation from the ministry. On top of that (cf. excerpt 12.4), some permanent secretaries told me that they did not always get honest opinions from the administrative officers, who also had a tendency to want to provide the advice they thought the permanent secretaries wanted to hear (if this had occurred during interviews, I would refer to it as social desirability bias). This became clear to the permanent secretaries when they received something completely different in a written case file compared to what was agreed on in a meeting.

Excerpt 12.4. Strong hierarchy

There has been a meeting at the permanent secretary's office with a number of officials from the ministry. The permanent secretary tells me that the ministry has an extremely well-established hierarchy. Unfortunately that entails that people do not always say what they mean. Some think what they will and do what is said, while others send something completely different than what was talked about at the meeting, the permanent secretary elaborates, and goes on to explain that you should therefore not be careful that it does not 'go to your head'.

While the permanent secretaries argue that this is probably done with the best of intentions or due to nervousness, they prefer to be challenged on their views and receive the honest opinions of those on the lower levels of the ministerial hierarchy.

Another permanent secretary also emphasizes the importance of challenging their views (and those of other managers) – he frames this in terms of the importance of managing upwards. However, as excerpt 12.5 shows, he also acknowledges that he will sometimes insist on doing something else. In this case, a head of unit calls the permanent secretary to say that it will not be possible to finish a legislative draft in time. The permanent secretary insists that it must be done in time, and they find something they believe to be a solution.

Excerpt 12.5. Managing upwards on all levels – but not always be right

The permanent secretary is participating in a meeting about exerting leadership in the ministry directed to lower ranking civil servants. The permanent secretary held a presentation, after which the civil servants can ask questions. An official in a blue shirt asks the permanent secretary how best to help them (i.e., the permanent secretary). The permanent secretary explains that it is about getting the most out of the ministry (i.e., taking the operational goals and challenging them), as well as leading upwards in relation to the level of management you are at. And sometimes say 'no' and say 'If you want it, it won't be a good product', says the permanent secretary.

But there are no rules without exceptions, so the permanent secretary continues with an example that contradicts what he has just said: The day before, the permanent secretary was called up by a head of unit, who said they could not finish the regular bill by Monday. This would mean that the ministry would have to make an urgent proposal. When the ministry has spent time negotiating with the political parties, it is not looked on well to then bypass them. The permanent secretary talked to the office manager and found out that they might be able to send it to the Queen the same day. The point of the anecdote is that while leading upwards is all fine and good, the leader might still sometimes put his foot down.

The example above illustrates how the permanent secretary wants the civil servants to put their foot down, but it also illustrates a situation where the permanent secretary admits that he does not necessarily listen to the civil servants when they do. Hence, the permanent secretary asked the head of unit to ensure that the legislative draft was completed, despite the head of unit saying that it was impossible to do so. In line with this, I also had a few heads of units who did not always find the permanent secretary to be in touch with the ministry's workload vis-à-vis resources. Head of Division 5 argues that the permanent secretary might not be able to put their foot down in relation to the minister, which affects the lower-ranking civil servants. For instance, when spending more resources than are available:

The permanent secretary is very close to the minister and somehow the permanent secretary succeeds when the minister is satisfied with them. And this sometimes makes it difficult for the permanent secretary to say 'no' in some situations – in relation to what can be done in relation to the minister's policy. But especially also what can be done in relation to prioritizing resources. Where sometimes you think, 'It's well and good that we have promised the minister to deliver on all five cases next week, but if you come down and look at the staff I have available, then it can't be done' (HoD 5).

The head of division argues that the permanent secretary sometimes acts as 'the minister's man' more than 'the ministry's man'. According to this specific head of division, this might be caused by the permanent secretary's orientation towards the minister and the idea that the permanent secretary's success depends on the minister's success. Combined with excerpt 12.5 above showing that putting one's foot down in relation to the permanent secretary is not necessarily always effective, it may be easier for division heads to follow their own course, as described in the first excerpt in this section 12.4.

12.3 The difference between permanent secretary and head of division

I asked the interviewees what they found to be the biggest difference between working as head of division and as permanent secretary; between being the first or second in line in relation to the minister, the attention and the responsibility. Generally, the interviewees point to the level of responsibility as the main difference, which I will elaborate on in the end of this chapter. First, however, I will account for the other differences, which were highlighted during the interviews.

RELATION TO THE MINISTER. Several civil servants point to the permanent secretary's close relationship to the minister as an important difference between being permanent secretary and head of division – for better or for worse. Among other things, this difference can be measured in terms of how the permanent secretaries usually assume the minister's perspective:

You move one step closer to the minister, and you move closer to the political decisions in a broad sense, almost in a more 'cross-cutting' sense. As a head of division, you still have a ministerial responsibility that's a little closer to your own division and the cases there. From having an hour to looking at the case [as head of division, AT], I have 10 minutes when it hits me. Maybe a quarter of an hour to read it and to form an opinion about it. In return, I focus on the overall aspects and see the cases a little more through the minister's eyes than with the professional/technical eyes (PS 16).

The close relationship with the minister is also visible in their everyday work. During meetings, for instance, where division heads argue that the minister looks to the permanent secretary for advice even after the head of division has provided advice:

I think the main difference it is that it is the permanent secretary and the minister. We're often present, but it's the permanent secretary who meets with the minister every morning, and it's the permanent secretary who has that very close contact. When we all sit there, it's still the permanent secretary who can be allowed... I mean – that's the direction in which the minister looks the most, and that's where the trust is greatest. There is no doubt that we are an executive board and we're also in there, and the minister also listens nicely, but that's ultimately the permanent secretary's responsibility. So the thing about 'being that', *the* boss, is definitely the difference. We're working on a mandate, and we're clearing the mandate up against [i.e. receiving clearance from] the permanent secretary and up against the minister (HoD 1).

This is illustrated in excerpt 12.6 below, where the minister asks why something is omitted from the slide. The head of division starts explaining why this is the case, but shortly after the permanent secretary interrupts the head of division and agrees with the minister. The conclusion is that the head of division should add this to the slide.

Excerpt 12.6. The permanent secretary's authority

There is a pre-meeting before the negotiation meeting. The minister says that he fears that it will be a little strange that the ministry does not have figures on the presentation materials. The head of division responsible begins explaining why this is the case, but the permanent secretary interrupts, saying that he agrees with the minister and that he also expected the figures to be included. It is decided that the figures should be in the presentation materials.

Despite the head of division's special knowledge within their ministerial remit, the minister will usually contact the permanent secretary before turning to other civil servants:

The permanent secretary is at the forefront. All the time. Always. The thing about just being in the second row, I don't think it's necessarily different from other enterprises, but it's special here, too. In other words, the permanent secretary will always be the first person the minister calls or sends a text message to or something at all possible times of the day. The permanent secretary is that person. The first and last. That's just how it is to be the top dog. Where she has the entire portfolio. She's responsible for everything we do, where I have a share (HoD 4).

More than other top civil servants, the permanent secretary experiences being caught in crossfire: The permanent secretary is expected to have their focus on leading upwards to the minister, to pay attention to the minister (and the minister's needs). The permanent secretary's calendar is at best dependent on the minister's calendar; in the most extreme cases, virtually synchronized with the minister's calendar:

As agency director, you have hands-on responsibility for any operation that you need to ensure is running. You have an organization you need to run – look down most of the time. You also have that as permanent secretary, but you always have to look upwards: provide advice to the minister, my calendar is synchronized with the minister's calendar. You can manage your own time as an agency director – you can't do that here. You're constantly running synchronously with the minister. You have to be good at thinking politically as an agency director, but that's almost apolitical in terms of how much politics is in it. And some agencies aren't political but can become part of a political object. So there's a very big difference. In many ways, being an agency director is more fun, because you have a slightly more normal life (PS 10).

Hence, the permanent secretary is more often available for the minister than are the division heads.

ALL EYES ON THE PERMANENT SECRETARY. Several interviewees also point to the attention as a substantial difference. All eyes are on you as permanent secretary, and many people interpret your actions and words during meetings:

People are looking closely at what I sit and do. You have to be aware of that. If I display a lack of interest in what the minister is saying, then the spokesperson will pick up on it very quickly. So you can't. Everything you go and do, big and small, is interpreted. Whether it's the minister who interprets it or the spokespersons or the whole organization. Everyone is watching. That also the big difference from being a head of division or agency director – it's that everyone is suddenly aware of what you're up to, what you're saying – how you take your coffee. Am I criticizing the milk in the coffee machine if I take these ones instead? [laughs and points to the small, triangular milk boxes containing long-life milk]. No, I'm not. Well, it's big and small. You have to be aware of that (PS 15).

As pointed out above, this attention also implies small, seemingly unimportant, details, such as the long-life milk one chooses. However, I also encountered other actors commenting on how the permanent secretary uses her phone during a meeting. In general, the permanent secretaries seemed to be aware of the signals they send. Small details, such as whether they showed up to a meeting wearing a suit jacket or not, could be interpreted by the participants and minister alike.

FINAL CHECK. The permanent secretary is the final check before something reaches the minister, and most of the material presented to the minister has been assessed by the permanent secretary – or at least passed over their desk. This has several implications: the permanent secretaries' workload is bigger, the permanent secretary spends a substantial amount of time on it, and finally that the permanent secretary is the final quality assurance:

The biggest difference is that you're the last stop for the system. Ultimately, you're the one who must be accountable for the advice given: Was it good enough or wasn't it? Politics is very direct that way. When you're a politician and have to face many decisions every day... well, it's really nice when things are going well. The flowers are blooming and the sun is shining. But it's just as hard when things goes wrong. And one thing is that people can be angry and disagree – that's politics. But if there's something [wrong, AT] down in the basis for making decisions or the process or something: 'That's not right, was it? That isn't what the minister should be spending their time figuring out'. Then it falls back on the system – and it's me who's on top. That it hasn't been good enough (PS 2).

The permanent secretary is getting a lot of information both from within the ministry but also from the other ministries throughout the central administration:

You get so much information all the time. Huge, huge amounts of information. You are the bottleneck, everything that comes down from the ministry, a lot of information. All of the [information from, AT] agencies – it moves up and has to go through me. And then I have to sort it for the minister in there. And the reason I have this job is because I'm good at it (PS 10).

Hence, one of the things that is expected of the permanent secretary is that they has an even more holistic view on the cases than the head of division. Just like the head of division has more knowledge across the divisions than the head of unit usually has:

I expect the permanent secretary will look at some of the same things. The permanent secretary will know a little more. As a head of division, you're involved in a lot of things, like management meetings, department meetings, where you have a more holistic view of different interests and what's important. There are some other stakeholders around you that you coordinate with, so there you hopefully have a better overview. The permanent secretary will have a slightly better overview: be with the minister for government deliberations, for negotiations, etc. So the permanent secretary will bring that knowledge to the table (HoD 9).

Thus, the permanent secretary to some extent has a broader (and sometimes more political), knowledge than do the division heads. In contrast, the division heads are expected to know more about the details of a case:

I can't check that it's right down to every possible detail – that legal issues and paragraphs all fit together and so on. There, I have a division of labour with my division heads, office managers and professional/technical staff. There is confidence that what they send to me is correct. But it's also a culture, because the values we have here – as I've just said that professionalism is a very, very central value, because it's simply the foundation for the system we have today, right? They must be able to trust the counsel we provide (PS 14).

This is not only true when processing written material, but also when participating in meetings. For instance, Head of Division 1 points to how she helps to translate the minister's vision and ideas into policy by helping the minister translate their political opinions into concrete, technical opinions:

And when we're attending international coordination meetings, when is the minister going to go on? And then, 'Okay, just listen – if this is what you want, then it is now. You have to go on now. Now is the time to say it'. I've been around for a few years now – sometimes it's smarter to be the first country to say something, sometimes it's important to be the last country. And then there's also

the translation; I mean, the subject is insanely complex, absurdly detailed. The minister does not know what he thinks about Article 5, Section 3. But the minister knows exactly what he thinks on a subject. But what does it mean in Article 5 Section 3? That is, the translation. I don't understand all aspects of the technique either, but fortunately we have people who do. But I understand it enough that I can do the translating. So that with the link between something the minister wants politically and then some text on page 4. I spend a lot of time on that. (HoD 1)

In other words, the head of division is acknowledging that while they might not be familiar with all of the technical aspects, they emphasize that they know enough to assist the minister.

RESPONSIBILITY. The final thing several interviewees point out is how, at the end of the day, the responsibility is on the permanent secretary's shoulders. They are the one making the decisions, but also the one with the final responsibility. Hence, the permanent secretary can delegate the work – but not the responsibility:

The difference is that ultimately it is the permanent secretary who has to draw the line in the sand and make a decision. You also experience this as a head of division – you also have several office managers; that is, there are times when there is disagreement or something: someone who has to make the decision. Ultimately, it's the permanent secretary who does it (HoD 9).

This is true both regarding to the daily casework and in terms of managing the ministry. Here, the permanent secretary decides how to structure the organization and who should be communicating what and when:

And then you can say about the organizational aspect: there's a difference in terms of being the one who makes the final decisions on: what should the organization look like? Who should sit where? Who should communicate and stand on the soap box in the end and set the direction and communicate the good ideas when we have them – and communicate the less good ones when we have them...? There's also a difference between being #1 and #2 (PS 2).

One head of division is quite precise on this:

The permanent secretary has the entire portfolio. She's responsible for everything we do. Where I have a quarter (HoD 4).

12.4 Conclusion

It is difficult to describe one way of being the administrative head of the ministry, because they each find different ways of handling the time pressure and

because of their different priorities and strengths. However, one thing they do all share in common is that they struggle to spend as much time on the organization as they would like. The permanent secretaries have a lot on their plate. Some permanent secretaries have therefore chosen to delegate various shares of the responsibility to one of their division heads. The permanent secretaries all emphasize the importance of having a well-functioning organization, but some argue that it is difficult to find the time. Others argue that they insist on prioritizing this work, instead asking a head of division to take their seat at meetings, such as meetings with political spokespersons or negotiations concerning something specific within their division in the ministry.

In general, the main difference between being permanent secretary and head of division comes down to having the final responsibility and authority to make final decisions. No matter how much the permanent secretary delegates, they can still force something through if they want to.

Chapter 13.

Case handling

Permanent secretaries spend an extensive amount of time on cases, which is the term used for all of the written material in the ministry. This includes *håndakter* (i.e., unofficial documents for the minister) with agendas, speech manuscripts, the minister's speeches, press material, drafts for legislation and so forth. Cases proceed through the ministerial hierarchy, the majority of them passing over the permanent secretary's desk before reaching the minister. Administrative officer(s), heads of section, and division heads have already seen and approved a case before it reaches the permanent secretary. While the number of cases varies from ministry to ministry, there can be thousands of cases in a single year. The hierarchical processing of cases renders the permanent secretary a bottleneck, and the permanent secretary's time is limited. As a case rises up through the hierarchy, so does the responsibility; as illustrated by HoD 6:

What happens, as there's a super old tradition for, is that in addition to quality assurance, the responsibility also moves up the chain (HoD 6).

In addition to the responsibility, some permanent secretaries also voice another reason why the casework is generally considered a very important task, as the following quote illustrates:

As permanent secretary, it's incredibly important to be in control of the details of the cases. I think that when we walk out the door today, no one is measuring us [the permanent secretaries, AT] on how happy our employees are or whether our organization is working. The most important thing is whether you knew your cases. This is both when you're sitting next to the minister, but also in the FKU (PS 10).

The permanent secretary emphasizes how, at the end of the day, the most importance thing is to have detailed knowledge about the cases and being on top of specific cases.

The following section elaborates on how the permanent secretaries handle cases and what they prioritize when reading them. The permanent secretaries pay attention to different details based on the future use of the brief: Are they going to present the brief in the preparatory government committee? Does the brief contain details on different options for the minister to bring to negotiations? Or is it a *håndakt* that the minister will use in a meeting with an interest organization? Across all these different types of cases, the permanent secre-

tary will usually have the following themes in mind, when reading: technical/professional reading, political reading, cross-disciplinary reading, and the format. Finally, the practices on providing feedback differs: some things can be handled with written comments, whereas others require a meeting.

13.1 Practices of preparing cases

THE HIERARCHY. Cases are generally written at a lower level in the ministerial hierarchy and then sent up through the hierarchy. When an administrative officer prepares a case, the head of unit will read it and either suggest some changes or pass it on to the head of division, who does the same. Most ministries use an electronic case system, the exception being if the case is classified, in which case several ministries still work with paper files, which are carried around in briefcases. Permanent Secretary 5 describes the process:

The first main story, that's the huge hierarchy we have. Where all the cases roll up through the hierarchy and the thumb is turned up or down: this case, is it ready to go on to the minister? Should something more be done to it? Should it go around again? So that's the 'ups and downs' in the case presentation system. The division heads are an integral part of it. They're the last level in the funnel before things hit me. So basically, they should be the guarantee that I'm getting a really good case – and therefore also that the minister gets a really good case. Then there are sometimes things that are easier to talk about than to write. We have therefore made a virtue out of it being easier just to come by and talk about a case for 5 minutes, 2 minutes or 10 seconds – and to clarify some kind of question: Is it okay to do this? Should we go right or should we go left? Then it's simply an effective way to do it. So that's pretty much how I think about it. There are so many things running through our system – so we need to do it the easiest way that works. Sometimes it's written, sometimes it's oral (PS 5).

As described here, one way of providing feedback on cases is to write something in the system or to edit directly in the case file. The latter is not the preferred course of action, as the system does not learn from that. Sometimes either the permanent secretary or head of division prefers to discuss the case in person; hence, the head of division might drop by the permanent secretary's office to hear if they have time to discuss the matter. If lengthy discussion is required, a meeting might be booked. If the permanent secretary wants to discuss a case, they will either ask their secretary to call the civil servants to the office immediately or to schedule a meeting. This must often proceed relatively quickly, partly due to tight deadlines. Many of the cases that reach the permanent secretary are categorized 'urgent'. Hence, they must be read and handled relatively quickly so they can be sent to the minister.

13.2 Priorities during case preparation

QUALITY ASSURANCE. First, the permanent secretaries read with a focus on the technical aspect of the document, viewing themselves as the final quality control. This function is considered especially important when the case serves as a basis for decision-making, serves as an answer to a Folketing question, or as a *beredskab* (i.e., answers to the questions one might receive) for consultation in one of the standing committees. In contrast, it is less important when reading speech manuscripts.

Then there are things of a more final character, like an answer to the Folketing, answer to the National Audit Office. Where it's important to get down in the details: What are we answering? Why do we answer like that? (...) And what has happened previously? (PS 8).

As the quote above illustrates, it is important to assure the quality of the substance because the minister is held accountable. Quality assurance can be considered an umbrella term for checking the different types of administrative knowledge going into the brief: technical, processual and factual knowledge. This is important to give the politicians the best basis upon which to make decisions. Thus, permanent secretaries work to ensure that the politicians have all of the information they need to make a decision. At the same time, the cases must be as succinct as possible, and case preparation often entails condensing and prioritizing information. It is not merely about informing about possible options but also about informing the minister about the *extent* of the different options, which include information about implementation and assumed impact. As Permanent Secretary 14 explains:

so in the bills and resolutions that come up, we show the distributional consequences, effects on the workforce, on economic growth and all sorts of things. Because then you know what's happening once you've made that decision. We've gotten better at it. We have better calculation models, we have better effect assessments, we have better assessments of the proposals in relation to what happens in the operations, how difficult it will be to implement, etc. (PS 14).

When reading a case, the permanent secretaries also point out the importance of being able to account for and defend the technical details and opinions in it. As Permanent Secretary 15 says:

There, you have to make sure you have thought through: Can we defend this, professionally? (PS 15).

Excerpt 13.1 below is an example of how the permanent secretaries work to ensure that the case illustrates the professional, technical basis for making a decision. In this encounter, the permanent secretary asks the head of division

to elaborate on some decisions regarding the presentation of the case. After some discussion, the permanent secretary asks the head of division to elaborate on some of the points in the appendix, on top of which the permanent secretary is concerned with ensuring that all of the aspects and dilemmas in the case are portrayed clearly. After discussing various details, the permanent secretary asks to extend the appendix even further to add further detail. The permanent secretary argues that he wants to ensure that the civil service has pointed out all of the potential pitfalls and difficulties of which they are aware.

Excerpt 13.1. Follow-up on case between head of division and permanent secretary

A head of division stands in the doorway to the permanent secretary's office and asks if he can enter. The permanent secretary confirms, and the head of division enters the office. The negotiations are now underway, and the Prime Minister's Office wants to know if enough has been done, so it is important that the minister announces something, says the permanent secretary. The head of division agrees but thinks that the ministry should think about the timing of the announcement. The permanent secretary considers the written basis for the given case, and there is a little silence before he asks if Appendix 1 can be elaborated a little more, looking at the head of division. The head of division asks clarifying questions about what the permanent secretary has in mind. The permanent secretary explains what must be unfolded. (...)

The permanent secretary also wants to know if the dilemmas and political bumps are described in the case. The head of division thinks so. The permanent secretary asks if a specific detail has been written into the new version of the case, which the head of division can also confirm – although it is slightly less specified than previously. The permanent secretary would like it to be elaborated in the new version and suggests that the annex be expanded. He justifies the addition by saying that what will bother him is if there is something that can become problematic without the civil service having pointed it out.

The civil servants' professional opinions consist of field-specific knowledge together with more cross-disciplinary knowledge, such as perspectives on legal questions and economic perspectives:

You look at whether there is a connection between the defined problem and the solutions. Are there alternatives? And what are the consequences? Do we have a legal basis for it? Do we have the finances for it? (PS 18).

It is thus important to present solid solutions based on technical knowledge. The minister also wants this, even though it might not result in the recommendation the minister hoped to see. However, the minister points out the

importance of civil servants emphasizing the technical aspects of a case, because they might point out details of which the minister had not been aware or had overlooked when initially suggesting the policy idea. As Minister 1 describes:

the system often has a technical position on what's the right thing to do. And you can get pushback if you go the opposite direction. But as I experience it, they do it professionally. Non-politically. There are often good arguments – something you've overlooked, something you haven't understood (M 1).

To sum up, when reading a case with a technical substance, the permanent secretary will try to assure the quality by assessing whether the brief ensures that the minister is sufficiently informed. This includes whether the brief presents different options, if there is sufficient information about the consequences of the options, whether it is legal, and whether it is feasible. Importantly, it also includes ensuring that the permanent secretary and the ministry in general can defend the technical options presented.

POLITICAL READING. Second, the permanent secretaries read the cases with a political focus. They pay attention to four things: whether the case illustrates that the ministry understands the minister's political vision, whether the format will please the minister, if the case contains the relevant political-tactical considerations, and whether the case could pose a risk towards the minister. The ministers and bureaucrats alike voice this expectation. When asked about what they expected the permanent secretary to be aware of when reading a case, one minister replied:

Both the technical and the political. And to have a sense of the political context: Can this be done? Where are we going to encounter problems? Are there any specific groups we need to make sure to have on board before moving on? What kind of problems is this going to create? Are there any interest groups that it is important to have on board? That we have to inform before moving on? (M 1).

I expect the permanent secretary to read along regarding the 'political musicality'. And whether the matter is adequately illuminated from all sides. So, more the political-strategic direction. Is it correct? Have the technical details been tested? (HoD 14).

As the quote directly above illustrates, the bureaucrats in the ministry also expect the permanent secretary to ensure that the permanent secretary has an eye for any political-tactical elements of the case. This includes reflections on whether and how the minister will be able to find a majority to support a bill, whether a so-called paragraph-20 answer could unwillingly provoke one or

more spokespeople, and so on. One permanent secretary expressed the considerations as follows:

And there it is important to have an eye for: Do we answer adequately? Are we considering all aspects? Is there anything the minister must be aware of? Is there anything we're not allowed to say? Or should say? Will the minister face criticism for something? Trying to think two steps ahead (PS 15).

The latter part of the quote is interesting for how it again points out the focus of protecting the minister. The permanent secretary presents two important points: Does the minister risk criticism due to their answer to a question? And does the enquirer have a motive of which the minister should be aware? In general, several permanent secretaries point to a risk-based strategy when reading cases. One permanent secretary explains this strategy as follows:

You're having the overall risk analysis of: How does it relate to what we've said here? Or do we have control of it in relation to the minister's accountability [ministeransvar, AT] and the Folketing? But it also means that I read the different types of answers with different intensity, because you also learn with experience what can be dangerous: Where do you have to be especially zealous when asking questions and ensuring and so on that everything has been thought through and that everything has been checked thoroughly? (PS 3).

Permanent secretaries are also expected to have their minister's political vision in view, and thus a sense of whether the minister will be satisfied with the facts. While the permanent secretaries are very aware of how they should help to realize their minister's political vision, they will often also serve as messenger when the answer might not please the minister:

It is very possible that, for technical or professional reasons, the matter can't land where the minister wants. But he can at least recognize that we have understood his thinking and what he really wants. And then, in a sensible way, we outline the runways that exist (PS 17).

As the quote above illustrates, the priority then becomes ensuring that the minister knows why this is the case and then to help the minister find another solution. The permanent secretaries stress this when highlighting the importance of honesty towards the minister and the Folketing. Several permanent secretaries stress the importance of not keeping technical, professional knowledge under wraps because of political visions. Instead, the best technical solutions should be presented for the minister along with all of the professional arguments to support the minister's desired course of action, as the following quote illustrates:

So, you must not use your professionalism to... well, to 'cheat on the scales'. Now that you know that the minister wants to go in a particular direction, you must

do everything you can to support them to do so. Also with any professional argument we can come up with. But if there are other ways to go, then you can't let it look as though the minister has found the philosopher's stone and that there's only one right answer to a question that may have several solid answers (PS 16).

Hence, if there are different options, they should be presented clearly together with their consequences. This is also a way of protecting the ministry and ensuring that trust is maintained (cf. Chapters 5 and 6).

SEEING THE BIG PICTURE. Third, the permanent secretaries are expected to be able to see the big picture, both in terms of what is happening in other parts of their own ministry but also in terms of the other ministries. The permanent secretary must therefore work to ensure that the right hand knows what the left hand is doing.

The division heads also expect the permanent secretary to pay attention to the bigger picture. When asked about what she expects the permanent secretary to pay attention to when reading a case, Head of Division 12 says:

After all, the permanent secretary is one step closer to the minister. Of course, I also check: Have we coordinated this with our colleagues? While the permanent secretary knows the ministry's divisions better. (...) So the signals from outside, signals from the ministers, and everything that runs across ministries. Because the permanent secretary sits in government committees and has knowledge of: Are we proposing something where the permanent secretary, with his knowledge from the other committees, can see: 'That, that's bad timing now', or 'the Ministry of Foreign Affairs just said: "You can't go that way" in another case'. So, to take that knowledge with you (HoD 12).

The head of division thus emphasizes how the permanent secretary is in a better position to secure the acceptance of the case throughout the ministry and in other ministries as well. The permanent secretaries themselves also mention this:

I might be better at 'looking across' [the entire ministerial portfolio red.]. Is there anything over here that doesn't match? Is there anything from another division that doesn't match what the lawyers told me? (PS 15).

One serves, of course, first and foremost one's own minister. But thereafter also have an eye for everything that is running across ministries, and that it's all connected (PS 16).

Thus, the permanent secretaries point out the importance of a comprehensive understanding of and knowledge about what is going on within one's ministry, but also about what is going on outside of one's ministerial remit. This knowledge could be obtained through meetings in preparatory government

committees and close collaboration with different ministries, which again demonstrates the benefits of a permanent seat in a preparatory government committee.

While there seems to be agreement on how the permanent secretary should ensure coherence across the divisions within the ministry, the picture is not quite as clear when it comes to ensuring coherence across ministries. This could be caused by the variation in whether they have a permanent seat in the government committees in general, and the Coordination Committee or Finance Committee in particular. When the minister has a permanent seat in one of these government committees, the permanent secretary is invited to all of the discussions, while the remaining permanent secretaries usually only participate in these meetings (or parts of these meetings) if their ministry has a share in the case. The working of the preparatory government committees is elaborated in Chapter 15.

READABILITY AND ACCESABILITY. Finally, the permanent secretary also focuses on structure, phrasings and grammar to optimize the readability, precision and trustworthiness of the case.

In relation to the minister, the permanent secretary should also have an eye for whether the current case-file format supports the minister's preferred work routine and experience as minister. Some ministers prefer to be very deeply engaged with details, whereas others prefer brief overviews. Some ministers like to have meetings to go through cases orally, while others do not call for a meeting unless a case involves unclear details. Some ministers have extensive knowledge about the ministry's field of responsibility, whereas others might be new to the area. Thus, the minister's experience and how they prefer to work must to be considered when figuring out how to adapt the format to the given minister. The permanent secretaries are aware of this, especially immediately after a new minister is appointed.

And what I'm looking at – is the case suitable for the minister? Is it clear enough? Can it be understood? Does it include everything the minister needs to know? Has anything important been left out? Is something missing? (PS 8).

This also means securing that the format is satisfying in general, including whether the problems, solutions and consequences of the different options are presented clearly. However, it also includes an assessment of whether the case file is too long, if the structure is illogical and so forth. When compressing highly complex cases into a cover of only one or two pages, this can be quite a challenge. Like most people, the permanent secretaries also have their idiosyncrasies, such as a permanent secretary who is very attentive to commas:

Now, we have a permanent secretary who notices many things and has a great sense of quality. She also sits sometimes and places commas, proofreads and that sort of thing, because she can't let go and things have to be 'packaged properly'. Then you trust the content more. (HoD 9)

While this may seem unimportant and these errors should have been caught earlier on, Head of Division 9 argues that it can still add value when the permanent secretaries catch these errors, because it enhances the trustworthiness of the case. An example of this is the wording of political agreements, as this permanent secretary describes:

If, for example, a political agreement must be made, where we sit and figure out the wording, then I get into the details and find out if I think it's right. (...) And a 400-page appendix written with many technical terms – then it's about producing a cover that must be short and precise. So you know what kind of political discussion it should be, what the recommendation should be, and any possible socio-economic consequences (PS 14).

Thus, there can be many reasons for permanent secretaries going into the details of cases and making what might appear to be very small changes or suggesting other changes. Most permanent secretaries prefer not to make such alterations themselves, instead providing their feedback to someone in the system.

13.3 Case handling practices

The section above describes what the permanent secretaries pay attention to when reading and assessing a case. But what happens if a permanent secretary is unsure if content is spot on? Similar to how different permanent secretaries focus on different things with different types of cases, so also how they handle cases when finding them unsuitable for the minister's eyes.

There can be various reasons to not immediately approving a case. In the following, I elaborate on some of the most common reasons voiced by the permanent secretaries and/or that I experienced in my observations. As mentioned in Chapter 4, even though permanent secretaries leave the office when the workload allows them to and eat dinner together with their families, evenings are spent reading and processing cases. Thus, while I have watched them read and process cases in the office, I have not been part of the late-evening case processing – or early in the morning. This was a matter of conversation that came up with the permanent secretaries during the shadowing.

Excerpt 13.2. Cases handling

It's 6:45 am, and I open the door to the ministry using my access card. It's almost empty. I go up to the permanent secretary's office. The permanent secretary is not there when I arrive, but there are lights in the office. I barely manage to sit before the permanent secretary comes walking down the hall, still wearing his jacket. The permanent secretary invites me inside his office, and I sit on the couch. 'Wow, have you seen...' begins the permanent secretary, and starts talking about the news of the day. Fortunately, I have managed to see this exact story on my way to the ministry. As we have briefly discuss the news of the day, I ask about the previous night: Could you take time off? No, the permanent secretary could not. He says he read cases for an hour – maybe 1½ hours – last night and made some phone calls. The permanent secretary really also wanted to read and process cases this morning, but instead came to talk with one of the ministry employees, who is working on a specific task in the ministry. The permanent secretary says that he therefore just wants to read some cases before we go to a meeting with the minister shortly. I therefore lean back on the couch and wait. The next meeting with the minister is at 7:00 am. In less than 10 minutes.

As the excerpt above illustrates, permanent secretaries also spend their time outside office hours reading cases. This means time in the evening after dinner with their families, but can also be the early morning hours. During the day, the permanent secretary is often interrupted by division heads, the minister, the special advisor or others in the ministry who require the permanent secretary's input. This excerpt is also interesting, because it illustrates how the permanent secretaries often use gaps in their calendar to read cases – even if there is only ten minutes before the next meeting.

Many permanent secretaries voice that they usually do not have the time to go into detail about calculations, legal sections or to check factual knowledge presented in the cases. Instead, they usually rely on this information being checked by lower-ranking bureaucrats.

I can't check that it's correct down to every possible detail – that points of law and paragraphs fit together properly and so on. There, I have a division of labour with my division heads, office managers and professional staff. There is confidence in that what is coming up is correct (PS 14).

Nevertheless, my observations reveal that the permanent secretaries relatively often encounter puzzling details in cases. When this happens, they either write comments in the case handling system and send the case back through the system or they might ask their secretary to call for a short meeting with the responsible civil servants. Whether they opt for the one or the other depends on the context and the urgency of the matter – and the individual. Excerpt 13.3

below illustrates one of the reasons to call a civil servant to the permanent secretary's office: to get an update on a case. The permanent secretary has previously been involved in this case but insists on more details being included by civil servants on a lower level in the ministerial hierarchy.

Excerpt 13.3. Understand the content of the case

Two officials are meeting in the permanent secretary's office. The permanent secretary begins the meeting by explaining why he returned the first case – the agency's arguments were too weak. And now the head of division just needs to be briefed on the case before reading it again. Hence this meeting.

The permanent secretary begins by stating that after talking to the agency director, the agency director thought that the two should talk on the phone. But the permanent secretary insisted that the case should be resolved at a lower level and that the agency should come up with something new. The permanent secretary therefore wants to know more about the lower-level exchange of words. (..) The permanent secretary later asks the civil servants what they now think about the case, and the civil servants explain (..)

The permanent secretary also asks about some phrasing that he thinks is difficult to comply with, and he wants to know who has written it. 'The Ministry of Finance did', one of the civil servants answers. (...)

The permanent secretary then repeats that he will read the case again, but that he just needed to be briefed on the matter by the civil servants first.

Other reasons to request a meeting with lower-ranking civil servants are if the permanent secretary had major changes to the written material, if something was unclear, or if the permanent secretary wanted in-depth discussion of specific details. The minister would not usually get involved. Still, I did encounter instances where the minister was involved, as in excerpt 13.4 below. Here, the permanent secretary thought it would be useful to get the minister's opinion on a case but ends up concluding that they will call the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Finance to discuss the matter further.

Excerpt 13.4. Approval of cases

A civil servant enters the permanent secretary's office after having been in dialogue with the permanent secretary about a previous case. The civil servant wants to discuss some comments made by the Ministry of Finance's permanent secretary to the policy dossier that the ministry has sent over. The civil servant and permanent secretary talk about what will happen to it. The permanent secretary suggests a different wording and asks if the civil servant thinks it will work. She does not think

so. The permanent secretary reads further in the comments, concluding that the ministry does not disagree with many of the things that have been written by the other ministry, but that he still thinks it's a little too rigid and needs to be softened up a little. The permanent secretary thinks it is a little too 'black and white' for the government. 'If we soften it up, will it have to go through again? Do I need to resend it?', asks the civil servant. The permanent secretary says yes but also suggests that they can go ask the minister together. They go down to the office, where the minister is not to be seen, so the officer returns to his seat. Just as the permanent secretary returns to his office, however, the minister's secretary comes and picks him up, and they go down to the minister.

The permanent secretary and minister are standing at the minister's desk, talking about the answer to the Ministry of Finance. The minister wants to know what kind of report is referred to in the policy dossier. The permanent secretary says that the report was made under the previous government. The minister is suggesting some changes. The permanent secretary concurs. 'Can we write this and remove that?', the permanent secretary suggests, showing the minister something on paper. The minister would like it removed completely. The permanent secretary says that he will have it removed and talk to the Ministry of Finance.

The permanent secretary returns to his office. On the way into the office, he asks his secretaries to call the civil servant. The permanent secretary sits at his desk, and the civil servant enters 30 seconds later. The permanent secretary explains that the minister is not satisfied with the case and how it is written, and the permanent secretary has therefore contacted the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Finance, asking them to give him a call. The permanent secretary will say that the minister isn't satisfied with the proposal as it is now. The permanent secretary will then update the civil servant on what is to happen next.

Sometimes cases require adjustment after the permanent secretary has participated in meetings with other ministries, such as when they have participated in the preparatory government committee meeting. Excerpt 13.5 below, illustrates an example where the permanent secretary has been at the preparatory government committee meeting, which has prompted some changes in the written material. Hence, the permanent secretary has called the relevant civil servants to participate in a meeting. However, the meeting is placed in the afternoon, many hours later. The permanent secretary texted the civil servants with a short note on what to do, but still wanted to elaborate on the take away point from the meeting that could be relevant in terms of the revisions.

Excerpt 13.5. Feedback from preparatory government committees

The permanent secretary starts by asking if they received the text message earlier in the day so they could get started with the work. One official confirms. The permanent secretary then explains what has been talked about at the preparatory government committee meeting, which involves what must be removed from the cover, some clearer reflections on options and opt-outs, as well as a request for a scheme providing an overview. One official becomes a little long-faced, noting that it has already been a difficult case to write. The permanent secretary emphasizes that there was agreement that the case was super good, but that there were just some things that needed to be a little clearer. (...)

The permanent secretary goes on to the next agenda item – the ministry is now going to take the lead on the case¹ because of three things. He then explains the reflections at the meeting and how they should be handled going forward before finally discussing the process. When can the government move on the case? (...)

Note: ¹In the covers produced by the ministries, some ministries will be written in the upper-right corner on the front page. These ministries are responsible for the cover. If the ministry is written in the upper-right corner, this means that the minister has approved the case. If the ministry is written in square brackets, i.e. [Ministry], it usually means either 1) that the case has not been approved by the minister or 2) that the minister/ministry do not vouch for/disagrees with the content of the case (rarely happens). Writing the ministry in normal/round brackets, i.e. (Ministry), is a way of nuancing the square brackets, and means that the ministry believes that the ministry can vouch for the content/agrees with the way the case is written. However, not all ministries use brackets and, as the above illustrates, this practice might not mean the same to all ministries.

Thus, there were various practices of giving feedback based on how urgent the matter is, the extent of the permanent secretary's questions, and what the calendar permits.

13.4 Conclusion

Permanent secretaries spend a great deal of time processing (i.e., reading and commenting) the case files in the system. There seem to be some overall themes in what the permanent secretaries focus on in their reading of cases. The permanent secretary wants to ensure that the case lives up to the professional standards (i.e., that *fachwissen* is provided), that it fits into the minister's vision and with other ongoing initiatives in the ministry and in other ministries, and finally ensure that the case file is written in a format and language that is accessible for the minister.

Even though the organization of the ministries differs, there were very similar traditions regarding how to provide feedback on cases. The rule of thumb is that the format should fit the feedback, and preferably in writing,

which is often less time consuming. However, if there are larger things that need to be addressed, it is sometimes easier for the permanent secretary to ask the relevant civil servants to come by their office to discuss the case. This is not common practice, but if a permanent secretary is in doubt about a case, they are also able to go to the minister to ask for their opinion.

ANALYSIS PART 4: OUTWARDS

Chapter 14.

The group of permanent secretaries

There is plenty of coordination between ministries, including the joint solution of interdisciplinary issues and launching of new initiatives. This requires that the civil service is able to cooperate across ministries. This chapter is about the cooperation between permanent secretaries. The central forums for formal coordination among permanent secretaries are the preparatory government committees, especially the coordination committee and the finance committee. These forums allow the permanent secretaries to discuss how specific issues are to be handled. The preparatory government committees are analysed separately (see Chapter 15). The following analysis focuses on the informal coordination and other types of collaboration within the group of permanent secretaries. Thus, this chapter accounts for some of the fora where informal coordination can occur, it analyses the importance of solidarity and cooperation within the group of permanent secretaries, and it investigates the importance of being part of the permanent secretary network. The permanent secretaries find a large degree of solidarity within the group, which they argue to be very important in their everyday life. The degree of collaboration I have observed might have been made to appear even stronger by the fact that the majority of interviews and observations were conducted in a period with a one-party government, meaning that there are fewer intra-government political battles.

The chapter continues with an analysis of the internal hierarchy between the permanent secretaries with a focus on the significance of being a permanent member of the preparatory government committees and the unique position as permanent secretary in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

14.1 Collaboration among the permanent secretaries

The collaboration between permanent secretaries assumes several different forms, as I will elaborate on in the following.

FORUMS FOR INFORMAL COORDINATION. One forum is the breakfast meetings, which are hosted by the permanent secretary in the Prime Minister's Office. It is a permanent secretary-only event, meaning that the ministry should not send a replacement if the permanent secretary is prevented from participating.

There are Friday morning meetings where we're only permanent secretaries. The other meetings; if permanent secretaries can't come, then a stand-in is sent. But not to a Friday breakfast. That's a closed, confidential space (PS 19).

This enables the permanent secretaries to discuss the different aspects of being a permanent secretary freely with others who might encounter similar experiences, frustrations and challenges.

Another such forum is the lunch meetings. Once a month, the permanent secretaries take turns hosting a lunch meeting for the other permanent secretaries. It differs whether something is actually on the agenda, but this enables the permanent secretaries to visit each other's ministries and to engage in informal conversation with their colleagues, as Permanent Secretary 10 explains:

Once a month we have a lunch, where the houses take turns hosting. *Most* of the time, nothing actually happens: We meet, we eat well, and we talk. And it's nice. *Occasionally*, it's a professional presentation (PS 10).

Another permanent secretary elaborates on the presentations at these meetings, explaining that they can vary considerably, from external introductory speakers to internal presentations on the Budget Act negotiations. Nevertheless, she also stresses that the important thing is to visit each other's ministry and to talk and exchange experiences with one another:

You get around to all the different permanent secretaries in turn and have lunch, and there's often a theme. It can be on the ministerial area, where you hear about something interesting. It varies. Sometimes there are outside people who come and give a presentation, at other times there may be budget negotiations, and then you hear a little about that – maybe some kind of cross-cutting management or whatever. It's very ad hoc. But the primary purpose of it is just to get around to each other, and I think that's a really important point (PS 3).

Finally, there is the biannual seminar for permanent secretaries, which a few of them mentioned. Permanent Secretary 3 explains:

Then we have a permanent secretary seminar – generally twice a year. (...) I could really feel a positive difference, also in terms of the collaboration and talking about, for example, things regarding the collaboration between ministries. So it has been super supportive to have a good culture of cooperation, where there aren't power struggles and you kind of work openly together. But of course for your respective minister (PS 3).

This boosts the collaboration and unity between the permanent secretaries and reduces the tendencies towards power struggles within the group.

All of the forums above are for permanent secretaries only, and I have not participated in these meetings. Thus, I know little about the agenda, the degree of formality at the lunch meetings, whether the permanent secretaries show up to the breakfast meetings etc. However, the permanent secretaries generally refer to these forums as sites for informal coordination and networking (i.e., opportunity to get to know each other better).

DAY-TO-DAY COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION. The permanent secretaries emphasize the importance of being able to call or text each other to clarify different aspects of cases. My fieldnotes contain many examples of this type of informal communication each day – including calls made in vain. Both through informal chatting during my fieldwork and the formal interviews, I was told that phone calls in the evening, on weekends, or even early in the morning are entirely common; in other words, this informal type of collaboration – and coordination – is crucial in the everyday life of permanent secretaries.

In general, there is a rule of thumb that things should be handled at the lowest possible level in the ministerial hierarchy. When the permanent secretaries call each other, then the communication has failed or stalled on the lower levels, the lower-level civil servants cannot reach agreement, something is unclear in the written material, or something else entirely. Thus, there are several different reasons for calling the other permanent secretaries. Permanent Secretary 4 also mentions ensuring that the other ministry has the specific issue on their agenda:

If there's an issue that's running between us and another line ministry, and it has gone a bit awry or lacks momentum, then the cooperation takes place quite informally – me calling the permanent secretary and saying that we have this issue and that we don't think it's moving. Can you help us and ensure that the case is prioritized in your system? (PS 4).

In the quote, the permanent secretary tries to maintain the momentum of a case. By making the other permanent secretary aware of this, the hope is that they will push their system to prioritize the case. Calling another permanent secretary also works to short-circuit the system to get to the crux of the matter in a given case. For instance, Permanent Secretary 14 explains how, if they are unsure of whether the lower-ranking civil servants have understood something correctly, then a call might be made to the permanent secretary to set things straight:

It's crucial that we can call each other and clarify things. And then, when we've agreed on something, we try to get the people in the system to execute. So it's crucial that the forum works. (...) I've called some people, because what they're

talking about at the office-manager level simply can't be true. And then sometimes it's just easier to short-circuit the process by just asking, 'Is that right? What happened at that meeting?' (PS 14).

I was able to observe some of these calls. As excerpt 14.1 illustrates, I observed a conversation with some lower-ranking civil servants who were quite sure a specific item would be incorporated in a forthcoming agreement made by another ministry. At least that is what they heard from the civil service in the other ministry. The permanent secretary was unsure of this, however, so he called his peer in the other ministry. The conversation was short and to the point – no small talk. The permanent secretary concludes that his notion was right: The issue was not part of the forthcoming agreement in the other ministry.

Excerpt 14.1. Short calls as shortcuts

The permanent secretary calls another permanent secretary. He cuts to the chase and wants to know if a specific point is part of the settlement in the other ministry – because the ministry is hearing this from the Ministry of Finance and the other permanent secretary's ministry. A short answer is given, the permanent secretary says 'thanks', and they hang up. The permanent secretary steps out to the front office to pass on the message. The permanent secretary explains that it turns out that the point is not part of the settlement, as rumors otherwise indicated, emphasizing that it is something that should be cleared at a lower level.

Several permanent secretaries point out that it is easier to call each other when you know each other. For instance, Permanent Secretary 4 mentions:

In addition, we call each other, but the model that you can just call has as a premise: that you know each other. That's why the social dimension is important. But there's no one I will resist calling if there's anything [I want to discuss, AT] (PS 4).

As this quote also illustrates, this does not mean that the permanent secretaries will not call one another if they do not know each other; however, it does mean that the permanent secretaries generally try to get to know each other, especially those with whom they expect to have a close working relationship, as strong relationships can further the collaboration.

ON COLLABORATION. The permanent secretaries find that they work well together despite working for separate ministers who might have conflicting interests. The permanent secretaries argue that they are getting better at coming up with suggested compromises and that they are less inclined to send

their minister into battles (*rabalderslag*, AT) on behalf of the ministry. This does not mean that all controversies are solved by the civil service; rather the civil service simply tries to be aware of when there are political disagreements that should be solved by the politicians and when there are administrative disagreements that could potentially be solved by the civil service. As Permanent Secretary 3 explains:

I think we have a really good collective. I mean, we're also a collective of permanent secretaries who obviously must not forget who we work for – the ministers – but that we must also make it work, because we do our job best if we also make sure to get... I mean, I think sometimes in the old days, there was a bit that you could get... at least I can remember how, here from the house, you used the minister as a tool for those system battles, for example between the ministries, then you sent your minister into those battles in the finance committee, for example, which isn't very good civil service, is it? Because if you can solve it yourself, then you just have to... I mean, you have to make sure to solve as much as possible at the lowest possible level and save the minister's time for what's important (PS 3).

Following up on this, the permanent secretaries seem attentive to not only their own minister's project but also to the overall government project. They still feel a responsibility for the government as a whole.

Over time, there has probably also grown a stronger awareness among the permanent secretaries that you have one – I mean, clearly you refer unequivocally to your minister, and you must do so – but the permanent secretaries also have a responsibility to the government management in relation to the overall project (PS 19).

In general, several permanent secretaries refer to a stronger 'team spirit' among the permanent secretaries than was the case in the past, arguing that collaboration and dialogue are important tools in their everyday work. This has emerged as a result of a sense of common responsibility towards the government:

There has probably been a stronger team spirit in the sense that you talk to each other. So, you call. There's no reason for young civil servants to 'fight' if we have some common responsibility for it together. We work for the same government. Of course, everyone has their own responsibility, but then we have to try to talk about it. That's not to say that there are no conflicts, but they're not allowed to continue in the same way. A greater – a *rather* stronger – recognition of shared responsibility (PS 19).

Despite the varying degree of interest in different issues on the agenda, the permanent secretaries praise their collaboration and their ability to solve problems together. This includes the ability to find joint solutions on issues

despite coming from different ministries, which is highlighted as one of the signs of successful collaboration:

I have yet to experience a case – even though they have been super difficult and we’ve had very different interests – that we haven’t been able to resolve. I think this is a signal that it is a sensible professional, rational collaboration (PS 7).

It is interesting that Permanent Secretary 7 describes the collaboration as ‘rational’, as one could also imagine taking care of oneself as being rational. So why is collaboration important and rational in the eyes of the permanent secretaries?

WHY COLLABORATE? The majority of my study has been conducted in a period with a single-party government, which might influence the collaboration between permanent secretaries and the line of thought about the government. A single-party government is generally going to be characterized by a relatively large degree of unity and agreement among the ministers, as Permanent Secretary 9 points to:

Well, now I’m not permanent secretary at a time with different parties in government, and I think that also makes it easier. Because there’s so much agreement among all the ministers. At least when I think back, I can remember times when there has been more hassle. I think there’s really good cooperation in the circle (PS 9).

Permanent Secretary 17 shares this view and elaborates on why a one-party government makes things easier: The ministers are working towards a similar goal – helped along by the PM as the leader of the political party. Conversely, parallel hierarchies can emerge in multiparty governments, where the dominating politicians from the respective parties (usually the party leaders) have more to say than the other ministries. This also influences the collaboration between the permanent secretaries:

Everyone has the same party leader, who is also the Prime Minister, and who therefore of course dictates that everyone is moving in the same direction. A government should always do so, ideally. But if there are more parties, then there are different agendas. Thus, it has also been my experience that parallel hierarchies then form: then there’s something with the party leaders or the dominant politicians in each of the parties, who have a little more impact, and that rubs off on the permanent secretaries, etc. (PS 17).

While the one-party government might be part of the explanation, the permanent secretary suggests there might be something more at stake. Permanent Secretary 17 explains that helping the other permanent secretaries can benefit yourself, because it may enable access to more information, you may earn

yourself a seat in a preparatory government committee, and then you may become part of the inner circle of permanent secretaries:

So in my view – and that’s my impression right now – what promotes the strongest influence among the various permanent secretaries, that’s the ability to be a team player. Which also means that you get a central seat, where the others choose to use you, and you are therefore able to obtain relatively deep insight into what’s going on. You may become aware of some problems at an earlier stage, and the others see you as a teammate, meaning that you’re actually involved in the cases at an early stage. At least I think that’s pretty central (PS 17).

The implications of being in the inner circle are discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. For now, it is interesting to note that collaboration is seen as something that might help one to advance in the hierarchy (as opposed to being aggressive). Thus, the permanent secretaries benefit from the professional back-and-forth in the longer run and the minister might also benefit from the permanent secretary’s access to more information, because they get better advice.

KNOWING YOUR COLLEAGUES BEFOREHAND. For the informal collaboration to work, it is important to know your colleagues well. Most newly appointed permanent secretaries are acquainted with some of the other permanent secretaries. If your career has been within the central administration, you have likely encountered one another at different points in your respective careers: you may have been colleagues, they may have been your boss, maybe you know some of them from SPOT,¹⁵ or similar.

Interestingly, several permanent secretaries comment on a distinct difference between knowing the other permanent secretaries before joining the group and what it is like after you become part of the group.

AT: Did you know the other permanent secretaries before you started?

PS 17: I knew the others well, but not at all like when you’re suddenly part of it. Before, you knew them as a stand-in for your own permanent secretary. And it makes a huge difference whether you’re there in your own right or as a replacement for someone else. So yes, I knew them and had a good relationship with them. But it’s something completely different suddenly to be there in your own right and to be part of the circle.

¹⁵ SPOT (*Statens Program for Potentielle Topledere*) is a programme for prospective agency heads or permanent secretaries. The participants are selected from among the top civil servants, often division heads, deputy agency heads, or individuals with similar management experience.

Becoming a part of the group thus alters one's relationship to the other permanent secretaries; instead of being a mere substitute for the permanent secretary, you are entitled to be there yourself. You have earned your seat at the table, so to speak. Some of the division heads also share this notion, indicating that they think the hierarchy is quite clear when you are in the seat as an alternate for the permanent secretary (e.g., in government committee meetings).

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR COLLEAGUES. Appointment as permanent secretary grants access to a select group of top civil servants. More permanent secretaries mentioned the importance of meetings over a cup of coffee together with the other permanent secretaries. As Permanent Secretary 16 recalls:

I think people were welcoming. Then clearly, you quickly start to think that there are some people with whom you need to get a cup of coffee: typically those you either did not know very well, or those with whom your ministry cooperates the most. You have a common interest in making things go smoothly and settling things. So you also share a common interest in getting to know each other and 'finding' each other (PS 16).

These coffee meetings are partly to get to know one another to improve future collaboration. Another important function of these meetings is to help the new permanent secretaries and to discuss their new role as permanent secretary, including how 'crazy' the job can get. While I did not take part in these coffee meetings myself, I did hear one permanent secretary follow up on some upcoming coffee appointments with relatively new colleagues. The permanent secretary checked with the secretary to ensure that these appointments were still in the calendar and had not been scheduled too far into the future.

Excerpt 14.2. Collegiality between the permanent secretaries

The permanent secretary asks his secretary if he has a coffee meeting soon with one of the new permanent secretaries. The secretary confirms, looks at the calendar, and notes that there is a meeting in the calendar three weeks later. The permanent secretary mentions that it is important to drink coffee with new permanent secretaries, because the first weeks as permanent secretary are really wild.

Many permanent secretaries mentioned the importance of taking the time to meet with the newly appointed permanent secretaries and, among other things, discuss their first weeks with them. Permanent Secretary 18 describes

this period as being tantamount to an apprenticeship, where the more experienced permanent secretaries help the newer permanent secretaries to navigate their new role.

New permanent secretaries often use the more experienced permanent secretaries for sparring. Not many permanent secretaries know it all from the start. You're taught, you might say. It may be a bit of an old-fashioned word, but it's the reality. Because you have a bunch of things in common when you're a permanent secretary – regardless of where you are: How do you lead the organization? How do you do things? How do you get employees involved? How do you explain the visions behind what we do? (PS 18).

The permanent secretary emphasizes that most permanent secretaries need this professional back-and-forth when assuming their new position. Despite the differences between the ministries, they share a lot in common. Coffee meetings allow new permanent secretaries to pick the brains of their more experienced peers.

BEING AN OUTSIDER. Several permanent secretaries also touch on the difficulties they can encounter if they are not familiar with the other permanent secretaries; permanent secretaries without a network in the central administration are confronted by difficulties:

Those who come completely from the outside and don't know anyone – they have a very, very difficult task. By virtue of my past, I know pretty much all of the most important people with whom I'm in contact. And that makes a big difference when you have to get something through (PS 15).

Permanent Secretary 15 elaborates that familiarity with someone allows you to be franker in conversations with them. Simultaneously, you will probably be better at reading between the lines and knowing what strings to pull in your interactions with the other permanent secretaries. This will be a great help when expediting cases and collaborating with other ministries.

The permanent secretaries as a group function in the same way as all other social groups – it facilitates communication if you know each other and each other's expected ways of reacting. That you know how the others see the world and how they want to approach it (PS 4).

Finally, as an outsider you lack the *fingerspitzengefühl* with the informal rules and norms guiding the interactions – an individual within the central administration referred to this as *Slotsholmsgefühl*. This regards the tacit knowledge regarding the interactions, the hierarchy, the behaviour of others, as well as

all of the other informal norms and mannerisms with which one must be familiar to be able to navigate the central administration. As Permanent Secretary 15 explains:

This means that you can talk straightforwardly with [those you know from previously, AT] (...). You know which threads you need to pull and how to act in that space. Where sometimes – when some arrive who don't know Slotsholmen at all, then they have... it can be very, very difficult to navigate. It doesn't just depend on hierarchy and everything else – it largely depends on how you manage a case (PS 15).

This so-called *Slotsholmsgefühl* ranges from easily identified, tangible norms (e.g., seating during meetings), to silent norms that are very difficult to grasp (e.g., how to act during shifts in the ministerial hierarchy).

In sum, outsiders lack a network within the central administration, they lack the knowledge about the processes within the ministries (*dienstwissen*), and finally they lack knowledge about the informal norms and rules useful (or necessary) for the strategic interaction; in short, they lack *Slotsholmsgefühl*.

CHEMISTRY AND CONFIDENTIALITY. Several permanent secretaries describe the job as 'crazy'; something that is difficult to wrap your head around and fully understand if you have not held the position yourself. Hence, a special bond seems to develop between the permanent secretaries – not necessarily equally strong between all of them, but most permanent secretaries find support from one or more of the other permanent secretaries. Permanent Secretary comments on the importance of the personal chemistry between the permanent secretaries:

Then there's the personal chemistry – who do you have fun with, who can you drink a beer with, who do you trust completely and that kind of thing. So there are different groupings (PS 10).

Permanent Secretary 10 also points out the importance of finding someone you trust and someone you can use as a sounding board. The permanent secretaries provide input and feedback to each other on the handling of their everyday life as permanent secretary. Thus, the group of permanent secretaries serves as a forum, where permanent secretaries can exchange experiences and seek each other's advice:

We don't necessarily see each other that often – the permanent secretaries. But I really enjoy calling and talking to someone I know who is good at telling me things. Again, it's a bit personal. Because permanent secretary is a pretty special job. That's just the way it is. And there I have, at least... and it's also my impression that all the others do, then you find someone you know: 'You're very

good at saying something to me', in a way, so I both can take criticism and good feedback in constructively. So it's a bouquet of close advisors, I'd say (PS 1).

Because the permanent secretaries have no superior civil servant with whom to discuss the different issues and dilemmas that arise, they are highly dependent on their permanent secretary-colleagues. The number of permanent secretaries has oscillated between 18 and 27 during the last century, so it is important to have a respectful relationship in the group, despite the competitive element between the ministries. Permanent Secretary 17 was surprised to find that the relationship within the peer group was more close-knit than expected, emphasizing the importance of supporting one another and the joint understanding of working towards a common goal of assisting the government:

I've probably ... and it might be something that has differed a little from what I expected before I landed in the chair, it has been the internal relationship between the permanent secretaries. It's been a *lot* closer than I expected, and isn't because I'd expected anything bad, but it's been much, much better than I'd expected. In other words, there's an enormous degree of support and a shared understanding that these are the common projects we work for (PS 17).

The quotes above thus underline not only the importance of collaboration, but also that the permanent secretaries experience a sense of solidarity within the group, which arguably benefits the group in doing their job.

STRATEGIC INTERACTION. Developing personal relationships with the other permanent secretaries is also an important part of the strategic interaction within the peer group. Knowing them enables you to pull the strings and act in a way that enhances the likelihood of getting your way. For instance, Permanent Secretary 15 says that it is important to get know how to navigate in decision-making fora:

Then it's clear – there's something like, can you figure out how to commit yourself in the internal Slotsholmen decision-making space? I mean – do you know how to do it? Which threads to pull? Do you have a network? (PS 15).

Another permanent secretary explains that her ability to understand and take advantage of the coordination procedures benefits her navigation in the group of permanent secretaries:

A strong permanent secretary is able to play with ... I mean, to understand the coordination that takes place. Take advantage of it. I fool myself into thinking that it's one of my advantages in a ministry that isn't so important – that I'm not so afraid of doing a little wrestling with the Prime Minister's Office or the Ministry of Finance (...). And that gives me, I think, an advantage (PS 29).

Thus, it is also important to act strategically outside of these important decision-making fora. For instance, a permanent secretary from one of the coordinating ministries shares how they have received texts from other permanent secretaries, who thank the permanent secretary for their collaboration:

I often ‘receive receipts’ – text messages, calls and in person – from permanent secretaries, where they have enjoyed good service – often where I have no idea, and with good reason, that something has been going on. Because the file-and-rank civil servants handle it (PS 28).

Another permanent secretary tells about how she makes sure to also text the permanent secretary in the PMO and/or the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Finance when something important happens in the ministry, as when the minister gets a majority for a bill or when negotiations succeed.

14.2 Hierarchy

De jure, there is a flat structure in the group of permanent secretaries, which entails that, formally speaking, no permanent secretaries are ‘above’ other permanent secretaries. De facto, there is a hierarchy that depends on some of the ministry structures: the government committees and the permanent secretary in the PMO. Interestingly, the hierarchy is experienced more strongly if you are in the bottom than when you are closer to the top. By this I do not mean that those near the top are not aware of it; however, it seems as though the others are more aware of it and the consequences hereof, such as missing important information. It is not the fact that you miss important information in itself, but rather that it means you are less informed when advising your minister and able to bring less knowledge to the table. A couple of permanent secretaries do point out that they simply call their colleagues in the other ministries if lacking information – but in order to do so, you also need to know about the information you do not have.

PERMANENT SEAT IN GOVERNMENT COMMITTEES. In 1947, the first government committee was formed, the Finance Committee, which was followed by the Coordination Committee in the 1970s (L. Jensen, 2011, p. 220). If one’s minister has a permanent seat in one of the permanent government committees, then the permanent secretary also has a permanent seat. Under special circumstances, it is possible for a permanent secretary to have a permanent seat despite the minister not having one. For instance, the Ministry of Justice permanent secretary once had a seat in a preparatory government committee due to the need for legal competencies.

There are a number of preparatory government committees, and establishing new government committees can be symbolic. Four government committees have prevailed for a long time: the Coordination Committee (*Koordinationsudvalget* known as *KU*), the Finance Committee (*Økonomiudvalget* known as *ØU*), the Security Committee (*Sikkerhedsudvalget*), and the Employment Committee (*Ansættelsesudvalget*). Currently, there is also the Green Transition Committee (*Udvalget for Grøn Omstilling*) and the COVID-19 Committee (*Udvalget for covid-19*), of which the latter was established during the pandemic.

One of the important things about having a permanent seat in the preparatory government committees is the access it provides to information about central processes in other ministries. This knowledge can be forwarded to the minister and also enables one to provide better counsel. Permanent Secretary 10 explains this as follows:

It makes a hell of a difference whether you're on a government committee or not. I used to have a seat on the steering committee, which by the way is also a reasonably time-consuming thing to put on top of a relatively time-consuming job. I knew everything that was going on in the Budget, more or less. I knew nothing this year. I had nothing to tell the minister. But we got lucky and our ministry came up, so we attended a handful of Budget negotiation meetings over in the Ministry of Finance. But my appeal to the Prime Minister's permanent secretary –and I know that several of us share this: When you're outside those government committees, there's so much you don't hear. So they have to give us some more information. I almost find it embarrassing sometimes now – because I don't know. And then I have to call the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Finance, and then I'll probably get some information, but he's sitting in 80 meetings with the parties, you know? (PS 31).

This permanent secretary really wants the PMO to pass on more information to the permanent secretaries who do not have fast seats on the central government committees. While recognizing that one can call the Ministry of Finance permanent secretary when requiring information on Budget negotiations, she emphasizes that he can be very difficult to reach because of the negotiations. Several permanent secretaries share this view.

In contrast, one permanent secretary agrees that an overview over the central processes in government is not necessary if you do not have a permanent seat in the government committees, arguing that it leaves more time for the work within one's own ministerial remit. They argue that it is possible simply to call the other permanent secretaries to obtain necessary information.

Further along these lines, some permanent secretaries argue that being a permanent member of the preparatory coordination committee and/or the

preparatory finance committee places you in the inner circle of permanent secretaries:

When you're a member of both the Finance Committee and Coordination Committee, well, I *especially* meet the permanent secretaries, who also sit on the Finance and Coordination Committees. So there's a kind of inner circle that you're part of. And that gives you much more intense contact, also because there are simply many more cases. (...) The committees you sit on are crucial for whom you're in contact with. Or at least, because you're in contact with everyone – but it's very telling re: the intensity of the contact (PS 5).

A permanent seat ensures ongoing contact with the other permanent secretaries, which often provides opportunity to discuss anything and everything. This includes '*den lille politik*' (the little politics), unravelling potential misunderstandings, and strengthening relationships – for instance in small talk on the way from Point A to Point B. Or by marking special occasions with cake. I noticed this phenomenon during my fieldwork, and some of the permanent secretaries explicitly addressed it. As Permanent Secretary 17 explains:

Of course, when you talk together four times a day, you also get a chance to talk about things other than what's actually on the agenda. And that's why you also ... I mean, get to use each other really well on many different levels (PS 17).

This is reflected in my observation presented in excerpt 14.3 below. Here, one permanent secretary finds the chance to discuss an entirely different matter with another permanent secretary on their way to a meeting.

Excerpt 14.3. Clearing other things on the way to preparatory government committee meetings

The permanent secretary bumps into the Ministry of Finance permanent secretary on his way to a meeting of in the preparatory government committee. The permanent secretary asks if the Ministry of Finance permanent secretary saw the early morning TV news. He had not. The permanent secretary explains that the minister was quoted as wanting to find money for a particular area. But the minister has not said that, the permanent secretary emphasizes, and reiterates that the minister has only said that the possibilities for more money for the area will be investigated. It has been corrected in recent TV news, explains the permanent secretary, who just wants to emphasize that the minister has not spent such a considerable amount without consulting the Ministry of Finance.

The excerpt underlines the regular opportunities one gets to clarify matters other than those on the agenda with the permanent members of the preparatory government committees. In the group of permanent secretaries, it

seemed as though those higher in the hierarchy found the hierarchy less pronounced. Instead, they regard the hierarchy more as a formality, as Permanent Secretary 26 describes:

And then there's probably a tendency that it's those of us who are in the Coordination Committee as permanent members [In contrast to the others, AT]. But I would say... that's such a formal view. I experience in real life, in practice, that it's *very* flat. That's my experience (PS 26).

The permanent secretaries lower in the hierarchy expressed a very different view, finding the hierarchy quite distinct. Permanent Secretary 25 indicates how she is very aware of her position in the hierarchy:

AT: Is it your experience that there's a hierarchy among the permanent secretaries? Or are you very equal? Or?

PS 25: No, there's definitely a hierarchy. No doubt. It is, of course, the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Finance, and then there are the members of the Coordination committee and Finance Committee. Or the permanent secretaries. There's no doubt about that. I mean – it's not something I feel so strongly, but I'm very aware of how I'm not the one at the top of the hierarchy.

In sum, whether you have a permanent seat in the government committee affects the amount of information to which you enjoy access, your relationships with the other permanent secretaries, and thus your position in the hierarchy.

PERMANENT SECRETARY IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE. Formally, the PMO permanent secretary is by no means superior to the other permanent secretaries. The reality is slightly more nuanced, however, and several permanent secretaries refer to how the PM's permanent secretary is stronger than are the other permanent secretaries:

In relation to the structural and principle aspects – it's a funny structure, but it naturally reflects the PM's relationships to the other ministers. Because we actually have a government of ministers, meaning that no one is superior – but of course there still is. It goes without saying that this applies to both the Prime Minister in relation to the other ministers, and it also applies *de facto* to the Prime Minister's permanent secretary (PS 3).

The PMO permanent secretary has a seat in the government hiring committee together with the Ministry of Finance permanent secretary. This entails a key role: drawing up the list of candidates from which the minister chooses when a new permanent secretary is to be hired. The PMO permanent secretary sits in a superior role in the hiring of other permanent secretaries, which underlines the hierarchy. As one permanent secretary explains:

[The PM's permanent secretary] sets a standard for what they want with the permanent secretary group, which is obviously reflected in what kind of person they recruit when there are open positions. Or influences the recruitment, because it's also largely the ministers who help to choose their permanent secretaries, but the Prime Minister's permanent secretary helps to determine from whom they are allowed to choose (PS 30).

Several permanent secretaries refer to the Prime Minister's permanent secretary as an *embedsmandchef* (PS 3) – a 'civil service boss'; that is, someone with whom the other permanent secretaries can discuss their challenges and someone who can help guide them through delicate matters. For instance, if they are in doubt whether they are making an optimal decision or maybe even if something is legal. As Permanent Secretary 19 explains:

The Prime Minister's permanent secretary doesn't have a special role in relation to the others. Formally. However, an understanding has probably developed that the PMO permanent secretary is the answer if you get stuck in a ministry where the minister wants something that the system thinks is illegal, or if any civil servant is challenged regarding their legality or 'is this right to do or not?' Then there is a duty, not just a right, but a duty to go to his boss. And if that's not enough, then you have to, if the discussion is with the boss, then you have to go to the boss over. When it comes to the permanent secretary, they disagree with the minister, well then there isn't [a boss, AT]. Where do you go then? Then you can go to the Prime Minister's Office: The PM's permanent secretary (PS 19).

Concurrently, several permanent secretaries think of the PM's permanent secretary as the PM's right hand; thus, they act as if there is a formal authority towards the other permanent secretaries. This was also something I encountered during my fieldwork. First, I heard about the so-called pastoral letters (*hyrdebreve*; i.e., informal instructions) sent from the PMO permanent secretary to the other permanent secretaries, as illustrated in excerpt 14.4 below. This phenomenon clearly signals authority: to be able to send out letters with instructions to the other permanent secretaries. I heard about several different pastoral letters during my fieldwork – always sent by someone higher in the hierarchy than the recipients.

Excerpt 14.4. Pastoral letter – matters in preparatory committee meetings must be handed in on time

I ask the permanent secretary about the contents of the pastoral letter that has been talked about. The permanent secretary says that the Prime Minister's permanent secretary has sent the letter out to remind the ministries of the importance of deadlines in connection with committee meetings. There had been a tendency for things to come late, making it difficult to handle such complex cases with much written material.

The pastoral letters were not alone in signalling a hierarchy; when the PM's permanent secretary calls, you answer your phone – and if you cannot talk because you are in a meeting with your minister, then you text back. During my fieldwork, I observed a meeting between the permanent secretary and other top bureaucrats – also from other ministries. As excerpt 14.5 shows, the permanent secretary still answered the call from the PMO permanent secretary – and the meeting continued without them.

Excerpt 14.5. When the Prime Minister's Permanent Secretary calls

The permanent secretary is meeting with other top officials when the Prime Minister's permanent secretary calls. The permanent secretary picks up the phone and takes a few notes while the Prime Minister's permanent secretary is talking. The permanent secretary then leaves the meeting and enters the minister's office to speak with the minister and their special advisor.

This excerpt illustrates how the PMO permanent secretary could affect the other permanent secretaries' priorities and behaviour. I rarely observed the permanent secretary cut off meetings due to calls from other permanent secretaries (although this did occur once after several missed calls back and forth). Finally, one permanent secretary told me about an evening where the PM's permanent secretary called and asked if he could talk – or if it was a bad time. The permanent secretary recalled that while it was nice of the PMO permanent secretary to ask, of course he replied that it was not a bad time. In fact, despite the fact that the permanent secretary had been just about to tuck his children into bed, he took the call, which lasted half an hour. This example again illustrates how far the other permanent secretaries will usually go when it comes to the PMO permanent secretary.

14.3 Conclusion

Good relationships with the other permanent secretaries are important, because they ease the daily informal coordination and collaboration. There are meeting fora aimed at strengthening the coherence in the group and the informal coordination, namely lunch meetings, breakfast meetings and biannual seminars for permanent secretaries only. This also enables them to engaged in a professional back-and-forth on subjects that occupy them at the given time. It is easier to become part of the group of permanent secretaries if you know some of them beforehand, which often proves to be the case if you have spent a substantial part of your career in the central administration. Central administration experience is also useful in order to obtain *Slotsholmsgefühl*, which includes familiarity with the informal norms and (expected) behaviour within the central administration.

However, there is still a hierarchy among the permanent secretaries. While there are several factors that influence the positions in the hierarchy, one of the key factors is permanent membership in the preparatory government committees, which provides access to more information, enables you to better navigate Slotsholmen, and provides opportunity to coordinate minor issues with the other permanent secretaries.

Chapter 15.

Preparatory Government Committee meetings

It has become the norm to use government coordination committees to coordinate the work within government. The number of committees and the work they do differ over time, but the coordination committee, the finance committee, the hiring committee and the security committee have all existed for years. The Prime Minister (PM) decides which committees exist and which ministers are regular committee members (i.e., participating in the entire meeting). The other ministers will participate in government committee meetings to discuss points concerning their respective ministerial remits. Parallel to the government committees are the preparatory government committees that usually consists of the permanent secretary to the regular committee members.¹⁶

This chapter concerns the roles of the permanent secretaries before, during and after preparatory government meetings, including a section on participation in government committees. I argue that permanent secretaries have multiple roles in the preparatory government committee meetings. They are representing the ministerial remit and their minister's opinion while also responsible for ensuring the quality of the substantial and technical part of the written material (*fachwissen*). This includes ensuring that case is written in an accessible manner and that no important arguments are omitted from the cover. According to my material, the minister focuses more on the permanent secretary's role as the minister's representative than the other aspects of preparation to which the permanent secretaries point. Following this, I account for how the permanent secretary prepares the minister to participate in the government committee meetings, followed by a short section on permanent secretary participation in these meetings.

The preparatory government committees follow the government committee meetings. As of August 2021, there are six government committees: the coordination committee, finance committee, security committee, hiring committee, committee for green transition and the COVID-19 committee. The co-

¹⁶ There are exceptions; for instance, the division heads from the PMO usually participate in the agenda points concerning their area. Also, the Ministry of Justice permanent secretary has previously been invited to participate despite the minister not being a regular member of the government committee.

ordination committee and finance committee are the most important and influential government committees. Having a minister with a regular seat in those committees thus puts you in the heart of the government machinery.

During my fieldwork, I observed meetings in the preparatory coordination committee, the preparatory finance committee and the preparatory committee for green transition. The excerpt in the chapter is from meetings in the preparatory coordination committee meeting. The other excerpts are omitted out of confidentiality concerns.

15.1 Before the preparatory government committee meeting

PREPARING FOR THE PREPARATORY COMMITTEE MEETINGS. The ministry responsible for the given government committee is also responsible for the preparatory government committee. The ministry will send out an agenda to the permanent members of the preparatory government committee and to other ministries with a case on the agenda, and the cases are sent out concurrently. The cases usually consist of a cover describing the overall presentation of the case. The cover is usually accompanied by a number of appendices if more details are needed. One permanent secretary explains her preparation like this:

In any case, I always try to have read what we call ‘covers’, which is the overall case presentation, so I at least know what the case is about in general. Many of the cases have a lot of appendices, which I only read if I don’t understand the case or if I think it’s a case of special interest. So if it’s [something that is far away from my area] and I don’t see any huge problems in the case after reading the cover, then I don’t spend more time on it. But if it’s [mentions example], then even if it isn’t my case, it’s still close enough to what we’re working on [in the ministerial area] that I might well ‘dig in’ and read it more closely (PS 5).

The permanent secretaries balance different roles during the preparatory government committee meetings. As Permanent Secretary 17 explains, ‘I feel as though I have three particular roles: the professional as permanent secretary in the line ministry, to be the minister’s mouthpiece, and at the same time the one who prepares the minister as best as possible’ (PS 17). In the following, I will elaborate on these three roles and the practices in the meetings.

15.2 The preparatory government committee meetings

REGULAR SEATS. The first thing I noted during my fieldwork was that there seemed to be regular seats, at least in the preparatory coordination committee meeting. At those meetings, the PM's permanent secretary was seated at the head of the table. The seat to their left was reserved for the PMO head of division. The next seats to the right and left of the PM's permanent secretary were reserved for the permanent members of the preparatory coordination committee. Excerpt 15.1 below is from my fieldnotes on a meeting in the preparatory coordination committee:

Excerpt 15.1. Regular seats (FKU Part 1)

The permanent FKU members have permanent seats at the end of the table alongside the PM's permanent secretary (seated at the head). The non-permanent members take a vacant seat at the other end of the table when they have matters on the agenda. Most permanent secretaries have taken their seats – now they're waiting for the PM's permanent secretary.

The PM's permanent secretary enters through the side door, sits at the head of the table and starts the meeting. There are five items on the agenda, and the PM's permanent secretary reads out the first item and asks who should introduce it. The Ministry of Finance permanent secretary says that he should, and he introduces the case. The other permanent secretaries then chime in with various comments.

The non-regular members of the coordination committee are free to take whatever seat they want at the table, usually only joining for their item on the agenda. At meetings with a broad range of issues on the agenda, permanent secretaries typically come and go for the entire meeting. The practice of regular seating is thus intended to ensure that the permanent secretaries are not scattered randomly around the table.

SAME PROCEDURE? There seemed to be a standard way of discussing the items on the agenda. The Prime Minister's permanent secretary chairs the meeting and gives the floor to the permanent secretary responsible for the case in question. If more than one ministry is involved, the ministry with the lead on the case usually presents it. After what is typically a very succinct presentation, the other permanent secretaries have opportunity to comment on the case. The Prime Minister's permanent secretary decides when to conclude on the item, and sums up the main conclusion. This procedure is illustrated in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 15.2. Discussing an item from the agenda

The permanent secretaries sit around the meeting table for the preparatory coordination committee meeting. The first item on the agenda involves collaboration between three ministries. The permanent secretary from the ministry with primary responsibility gets the floor and presents the case based on the *cover*. This elicits a number of comments. One of the permanent secretaries thinks that the other permanent secretaries should wait before doing more on the matter until the government has figured out what it wants politically. Some parts of the case are also discussed that are considered to be absolutely central in relation to whether the content has any real relevance in society. Several permanent secretaries speak up, and there is a bit of an exchange before the PM's permanent secretary asks if there are any other comments before concluding on the matter. There are none, so the PM's permanent secretary asks if the changes can be ready the next day at 15.00 (26 hours from now). The permanent secretary confirms.

Note that the timeframe for implementing the changes is 26 hours, after which the document is to be distributed to the ministers in the coordination committee. In this excerpt, the permanent secretaries discuss various aspects of the case material they have read before the meeting. I elaborate on what they discussed below.

QUALITY ASSURANCE. The permanent secretaries argue that the preparatory government committee meetings are a place where they can ensure that the quality of the basis for decision-making is satisfactory. This entails that:

- Ensure that the case meets the professional standards within a field (*fachwissen*)
- Ensure that the consequences of different decisions are presented clearly
- Ensure that the case is written in a language that the politicians understand
- Ensure that the case is accurate (i.e., tell it like it is with no 'masking information')

In the interviews, the permanent secretaries are concerned with three aspects of the content. First, the facts and analysis should be correct and satisfy professional standards. I find it interesting that they emphasize this, because the case has already ascended through the ministerial hierarchy, meaning that many civil servants have already assessed it. Nevertheless, the permanent secretaries appear to view their assurance of the final quality of the *fachwissen* as an important part of their role.

Our role is to ensure that it is correctly described and that they're given a fully informed basis for making decisions so that they know what they're making decisions about (PS 11)

More specifically, the permanent secretaries' respective backgrounds in terms of education and career represent different types of *fachwissen* that they put into play. For instance, the permanent secretaries with legal backgrounds are expected to act as 'emergency brakes' in the legal aspects of the case.

This also entails ensuring that the consequences of making different decisions are presented clearly for the politicians. The permanent secretaries discuss whether the language is accurate and whether the consequences are presented clearly. As Permanent Secretary 3 explains:

The thing about being a collective trying to explain the consequences of decisions to the politicians and not trying to call cutbacks for 'efficiency measures' – because then you're not taking co-responsibility. You can do what you want and to some extent you can always do things better and cheaper. But at some point, there will be consequences. As with the 're-prioritisations', for example – maybe we've had a bit of a habit of talking on such an abstract level that the decision-makers – the politicians – may not necessarily have always been told what it is that they have decided (PS 3)

Excerpt 15.3 below illustrates how the permanent secretaries are concerned with ensuring that the basis for decision-making is as accurate as possible. But it also demonstrates how this can be trickier than it sounds. In the example, the other permanent secretaries are not satisfied with how the case is written. They find it misleading for the ministers and think the arguments are too subjective and that the material from the report has been cherry picked. It is problematic if important arguments or facts are excluded from the material to the other ministers, because doing so undermines the basis for decision-making. Hence, some also point out that it is fine if the ministers decide on the initial recommendation, as long as it does not distort the basis for decision-making.

Excerpt 15.3. (FKU part 2)

Item 2 on the agenda is a case from a line ministry, which the permanent secretary from that ministry introduces. After the introduction, another permanent secretary indicates that he would like the floor, which the PM's permanent secretary grants him. The permanent secretary does not think that the matter is ready to go to the other ministers. He thinks that the case is set up too subjectively. The line ministry permanent secretary is very calm despite the questions that are flying at him, and he responds to them. Several other permanent secretaries enquire into the set-up of the expert group. The permanent secretary explains that the expert group has been established in a way that makes it very divided – some are very opposed, while some are very much in favour. The permanent secretary therefore does not expect an unequivocal conclusion. The permanent secretary who initiated the criticism is quite sharp in his wording and does not think that the cover is satisfactory, because he believes that the things that are presented from an already existing report are presented too subjectively – it seems a little too carefully selected. It will give a skewed picture of the case with the other ministers, the permanent secretary argues. A third permanent secretary speaks up and supports this latter point. The PM's permanent secretary concludes on the situation and suggests that the line ministry writes the paper together with the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry of Finance permanent secretary and the line ministry permanent secretary both say 'yes'. The PM's permanent secretary then proceeds to the third item on the agenda.

The PM's permanent secretary ends up suggesting that the written material is processed again, this time with the Ministry of Finance on board. Note two things: While the PM's permanent secretary frames this as a suggestion, it is in fact a conclusion. Based on the encounters I have observed, it would have been very difficult in this case for the permanent secretary who presented the item to decline rewriting the paper with the Ministry of Finance (see more on the special position of the PM's permanent secretary in Chapter 14). Note also that the Ministry of Finance is asked to assist the line ministry, despite the criticism about how the framing and content of the case does not relate to financing. This illustrates the position of the Ministry of Finance atop the hierarchy and how the PM's permanent secretary trusts that the job will be done thoroughly and in a well-balanced manner, satisfying the standards expected of written material.

Second, every permanent secretary represents a ministry with some remit-specific *fachwissen*. If there are cases in the Ministry of Social Affairs touching on the health professional remit, the other permanent secretaries will look to the Ministry of Health permanent secretary to see if they have any comments

or objections to the case. The permanent secretaries expect themselves and each other to be particularly aware of their respective remits:

As a starting point, the Ministry of Climate and Energy's permanent secretary is expected to cover issues concerning climate and energy, the head of the Ministry of Finance is concerned with public finances, the head of the Ministry of Business Affairs' with trade and commerce, etc. However, a more holistic approach is typically taken, where the various considerations are weighed when arriving at solutions together. In that sense, you're not just looking after the interests of your own area. That wouldn't help things along (PS 18)

Finally, the permanent secretaries see their role as aligning the policy initiatives across ministries. I was surprised to encounter this, as I thought this occurred among the lower-ranking civil servants. Usually, there has also been coordination on the lower levels in the ministerial hierarchy. Still, the permanent secretaries explain that there might be knowledge about ongoing initiatives in other ministries, about discussions among ministers and so forth that has not reached the lower-ranking civil servant level. Thus, the permanent secretaries find they still have an important part to play. As Permanent Secretary 5 says:

Then there is general coordination in relation to how the things we each work with must fit with what is happening in adjacent areas (PS 5)

While the content of the cases is the be-all and end-all of the case-preparation, the case presentation is also very important. The permanent secretaries also read the cases to ensure that the content can be understood by the minister and other politicians. The permanent secretaries also see part of their job as ensuring that the cases are accessible to the politicians. The cases often build on complex material that has been boiled down to a cover – preferably only one or two pages. There is a fine line between what to include and what to leave for the appendix, how many technical details to include, and when the language becomes too esoteric. This also goes for the appendix: it should be comprehensible for the politicians while also presenting all of the details not featured in the cover. As Permanent Secretary 14 describes:

Very simply put: we must make sure in the [preparatory, AT] committees to provide the best possible basis for decision-making for the government, so that the discussions they have in those committees are applied to material they can understand. (...) and that is to prepare cases to ensure that there is a proper political discussion on an informed basis. And a 400-page appendix written with many technical terms – then it's about producing a cover that must be short and precise. So you know what kind of political discussion it should be, what the recommendation should be, and any possible socio-economic consequences (PS 14)

During my fieldwork, I got the impression that the preparation of cases and finding the balance between details and comprehensibility, between keeping things concise yet readily accessible to politicians, is crucial *dienstwissen* for permanent secretaries. In the preparatory government committees, the most experienced permanent secretaries demonstrated an insight in the case-preparation process when pinpointing potential pitfalls in the case presentation in cases not on their own remit. This underlines the importance of *dienstwissen* that can be used across ministerial remits.

Excerpt 15.4 below is an excerpt from my fieldnotes on the preparatory coordination committee meetings. The excerpt emphasizes the argument above, about how the permanent secretaries are keen to remind each other about how the case is viewed from their ministerial remit.

Excerpt 15.4. The best possible basis of decision (FKU part 3)

In general, it is the PM's permanent secretary who grants the word to the various permanent secretaries when they indicate that they would like the floor. The permanent secretaries who speak up typically comment on the matter from perspective of their ministry: the permanent secretary from the Ministry of Climate intervenes on climate, whereas the permanent secretary from the Ministry of Business Affairs comments on the matter from the perspective of commerce. The most experienced permanent secretaries also comment on some more general things. Some permanent secretaries say little, but mainly take notes on the yellow cover, on a pad or on their iPad. The permanent secretary from the Ministry of Finance comments a lot on the other cases. The Ministry of Justice did not send their permanent secretary; instead, there is a head of division in the permanent position belonging to the Ministry of Justice permanent secretary. The Ministry of Justice has an important function, as the other cases often include a legal aspect.

The excerpt also illustrates how some ministries have a more cross-disciplinary role, such as the Ministry of Justice, which seems to be especially important. This is underlined by the regular involvement of the Ministry of Justice, despite it being a head of division at the given meeting instead of the permanent secretary. Finally, the excerpt illustrates how the status of the PM's permanent secretary is cemented: the other permanent secretaries often address her directly.

Further along these lines, the preparatory government committee meetings is a forum in which the permanent secretaries can test each other's arguments. This is done in a bid to ensure that the politicians must only concern themselves with the policy when they are processing the case:

It's preparation in the sense that it is considered whether the cases have been presented clearly. What should the government committee decide on? Have the important considerations that must be taken into account been outlined? We don't sit and decide, but we make sure that the basis for decision-making that the government receives is qualified. The nature of preparatory government committee meetings is also such that someone might pipe up and ask: 'Why now? Shouldn't this be the most important thing?' The arguments are tested. The permanent secretaries share the ambition that the cases that emerge must be prepared and laid out to the extent that it is primarily the political that remains (PS 18)

I also encountered this during my fieldwork. Excerpt 15.5 illustrates an instance where two permanent secretaries disagree on the framing of the written material. After deliberations back and forth, and a line ministry permanent secretary who disagrees with the PM's permanent secretary, the PM's permanent secretary turns to the head of division and asks him directly to challenge her argument. The head of division then provides counterarguments, and the discussion continues a bit further.

Excerpts 15.5. Testing arguments at FKU

The permanent secretary is given the floor by the permanent secretary from the Prime Minister's Office, after which he presents the case. The PM's permanent secretary then asks if there are any comments. At first there is silence, so the PM's permanent secretary asks the PM's Department Counsel (i.e. the PMO's counterpart to a division head), who hesitates slightly, but then makes a modest contribution. Then there are several permanent secretaries who indicate that they want to speak. After some debate on a specific aspect of the matter, the responsible permanent secretary suggests that the ministry can just take that part out. But the PM's permanent secretary speaks out against this, insisting that it should remain in the case, so that the ministers are fully informed. The PM's permanent secretary then asks where the stakeholders are on the case. Two other permanent secretaries support the PM's permanent secretary and also believe that this part should remain in the case. The responsible permanent secretary fights a bit and disagrees, arguing against. The PM's permanent secretary turns to the PM's Department Counsel, repeats his point, and says: 'Argue against me', and looks at the Department Counsel. The PM's department counsel says that he would do the same and therefore comes up with his proposal on how the case should be written. The department counsel looks at the PM's permanent secretary while elaborating on his views. The PM's permanent secretary replies that they have probably misunderstood one another slightly, but that at least one cannot remove the whole element from the case. The responsible permanent secretary agrees. The discussion continues a little further. Finally, the PM's permanent secretary concludes on the matter, and the responsible permanent secretary agrees with the solution provided.

Ultimately, it turns out they may have simply talked past each other, and they find a solution that they both seem content with. Still, the excerpt illustrates how they do not settle with something they disagree on and that they want to discuss arguments as well as substance.

In general, the permanent secretaries underlined that the work in the preparatory government committees is conducted with a single goal in mind: Priming the politicians to make decisions. The permanent secretaries repeatedly stressed that they do not make decisions in the preparatory government committees. They prepare the cases by illuminating the facts, scenarios and consequences in a comprehensible language that should give the politicians the best possible basis for making a decision:

For the preparatory coordination committee meeting, our role is to help ensure that the case is as well-prepared as possible, so that the politicians can make a decision on a good basis (PS 10)

Thus, the overall argumentation is that the permanent secretaries should prepare cases without actually making decisions. In the following, I will show how the permanent secretaries navigate the political landscape and represent their minister.

MINISTER SPOKESPERSON. On top of *fachwissen*, several permanent secretaries also point out the importance of serving as the minister's spokesperson in the preparatory government committee. For some permanent secretaries, this entails trying to move the presentation of a case in a direction that pleases the minister, while others argue that the preparation should not point the case in any political direction. Thus, the interviews reveal some measure of dissent in how permanent secretaries represent their respective ministers in the preparatory government committees. This is a potentially sensitive issue, because political responsiveness is often presented as being opposed to representing *fachwissen*.

Some permanent secretaries argue that their role is 'to attend to the minister's interests. If there's something that she's particularly occupied with, then of course I should pass that on' (PS 9). The permanent secretary argues that the minister's position on an issue should be passed along to the preparatory government committee. Thus, it is important to ensure that what the Minister wants appear clearly in the case.

Still, some permanent secretaries argue that the permanent secretaries are not merely trying to defend their own interest (i.e. the interest seen from the perspective of their ministerial remit). Instead, they argue that there is a common ambition among the permanent secretaries that the cases that emerge

must be prepared to the extent that it's primarily the political discussion that. Exactly how far the preparatory government committee should go to craft compromises and make common recommendations when preparing cases is marked by intersubjective diversity in my interview transcripts. This surprised me when I returned to my interviews, because I found there to be a tacit, common understanding of this in the preparatory government committee meetings I observed.

In addition to representing one's minister, another reason to be aware of your minister's opinion on different matters is to be able to have 'preliminary political considerations'. Permanent Secretary 17 points this out:

It's important that you have a relatively good idea of where your minister is politically. Also wider than the line ministry for which I am responsible – but in general. So that you can have an initial political discussion in the preparatory committees where you say something like: 'Okay, we should probably expect my minister to be over here somewhere'. And then you might as well try to get the cases brought to where we have qualified shared expectations that the government will actually be positioned, or at least address the themes that interest them (PS 17).

Accordingly, it is important to know the ministers' positions on cases to ensure that the themes of importance to them are addressed. It is worth noting that another objective is to 'bring the cases to a place' where they expect the politicians to be positioned. What that exactly means is not completely clear from the quote alone. Taking the other interviews into account, this might be to elucidate potential political disagreements and, if possible, provide suggestions for possible political compromises. Permanent Secretary 11 describes the process of including different opinions in the cases:

after all, I can't trump another minister's position. If a permanent secretary from some ministry comes and says, 'my minister means this' and that he has a very strict mandate from the minister and can't compromise on anything, then I can't just sit and say, 'We do it'. I mean – that's not my role or my position at all. My role is to encourage you to find agreement, and then try to arrange for the case to be written in a special way. Of course, I have some right to conclude on how the case is written, but there's a basic rule that all ministries may write what they think into the case. So I can't play a trump if some ministry will have written 'We mean this and that' and professionally such and such. Then they're welcome to do so. Then my ministry can write, 'We disagree with that because of such and such and such'. So it's more about getting the cases written properly than hitting each other in the head (PS 11).

Hence, the permanent secretary argues that they cannot force something through in the preparatory government committee, but also underlines that they deem it to be important to investigate the options for agreeing on one

recommendation. If the permanent secretaries arrive with different opinions and cannot reach an agreement, they can write their respective recommendations and ensure the clear description of the disagreement. The discussion is then left to the ministers:

The other thing is – can we somehow promote some compromise and some agreement? If we can't do that, then the ministers must debate it, and that's fine. And then we have to write up the papers – 'you can do this and you can do that' – and they make the recommendation and the others recommend this and that. That's perfectly fine, then they have to engage in political debate about it. But there's also a great consideration that – because there are really, really many cases – that we contribute so that they can be able to find some solutions and compromises that allow everyone to be a part of it. So in my case – obviously, I have the case that it's about, and then I typically have a 'håndakt' from my ministry that might include something about what the different people in the ministry think and some professional input (PS 11).

The quote illustrates how various disagreements can be included in a case. The permanent secretary emphasizes the effort to finding compromises but also underlines how the ministry is at liberty to enhance and argue for their own position on matters. This is most pronounced in joint recommendations for a given decision.

There seems to be agreement that the permanent secretaries should not point the ministers in a specific direction; rather, they should help to cast light on the different paths the ministers can choose but leave the actual choice to the politicians. As Permanent Secretary 11 argues, the permanent secretaries seek out political consensus when preparing the cases. Still, the different political options must still live up to the quality criteria presented above:

So the purpose is, if there are different attitudes, can you then find some compromises? The attitudes thus typically cover some considerations that may also be professionally based. Can you find some models that everyone can identify with in light of the existing considerations, but also in relation to the different possible political attitudes that might exist? (PS 11).

There can be a fine line between finding and presenting compromises without directing policy in any direction, as this quote from Permanent Secretary 8 illustrates, 'something that I've always emphasized, and sometimes had to raise my voice about, is that it isn't out job to point the decision-making process in any specific direction. Our job is to provide the basis for making good decisions'. This quote suggests that the permanent secretaries might point the basis for decision-making in a specific direction, even though they argue that it is not their job to do so. Another permanent secretary explains that they can sometimes get so immersed in the case and trying to find a solution that they

must take a step back and ensure that they are working towards their minister's political vision – or at least within the mandate:

Sometimes we find ourselves in a space where it's like the area interest is up against the Prime Minister's interest or other minister's interests. Where we might just forget our minister. And then we have to make sure to get our minister 'on board' again. You're working to find professionally sound solutions together with your colleagues, but at the same time you have to remember your minister (PS 3).

In short, the permanent secretaries discuss the cases with their minister, their ministerial remit (*fahcwissen*), and the government all in mind. Balancing these concerns comes on top of communicating often rather complex material in a succinct and understandable manner without losing the point or too much detail. The common goal of the permanent secretaries is that the case is written in such a manner where all that is left for the ministers are the political considerations and debate.

MINISTERS' EXPECTATIONS TO 'FKU'¹⁷. The expectations of the ministers and the permanent secretaries regarding the preparatory government committees overlap to some degree. It is also mentioned that the preparatory government committee should ensure that the cases live up to professional standards:

The FKU is about ensuring that we have a case that has been set up and is ready for the ministers, also in relation to how the problem is set out, presentation of any possible dilemmas and options. And governments can operate a little differently in that regard. So the government I'm part of – we want to have the dilemmas on the table. We also want the options on the table. If there are multiple options, then get them out so that we can see the alternative choices. And it should be very clear if there's only one recommendation why there's only one and why there are no other options. Otherwise – it's best to lay it all out. (M 2)

This quote also enhances the importance of presenting the ministers with different recommendations for action. However, the ministers place special emphasis on the importance of the permanent secretary representing the minister at these meetings. They argue that the permanent secretaries should go to great lengths to promote their respective minister's opinions and to ensure that they are stated clearly in the written material:

¹⁷ In my interviews, it is often the preparatory coordination committee meetings (*FKU*) that is discussed, so many examples regard FKU. However, the mechanisms seemed to apply across the different preparatory government committees.

I expect the permanent secretary to promote my input into the political processes and on agenda items. The most important work, of course, is for the Minister's views to be reflected in the cases that are under consideration. And disagreements sometimes occur. Well, politics is about attitudes, and they also clash internally in governments. It's therefore important that the permanent secretary and minister are in close dialogue prior to not only the committee meeting itself but also prior to the preparatory meeting in which the permanent secretary has a seat. Because the preparatory meeting *isn't* the permanent secretary's meeting. The preparatory meeting is preparation for the ministers' meeting and I also feel that, at least for me, it works relatively well (M 4).

The ministers argue this to be important, because the preparatory meetings settle so many issues. As Minister 7 states, she expects the permanent secretary to incorporate her opinion one way or the other: to persuade the others to make it the recommendation and ensure that the minister's opinion is reflected in the material:

First of all, the permanent secretary represents me in the preparatory meetings. And represents the ministry in the preparatory meetings. After all, a great deal has been negotiated and agreed upon before being presented to the politicians. That is, the permanent secretary is my extended arm and must ensure that my positions are fought for, worked in, or at least clarified before they even reach the political level (M 7).

Another minister places more emphasis on the 'split recommendations', arguing that the permanent secretary should only contend with the other permanent secretaries if they know that the issue is very important for the minister. Otherwise, the permanent secretary should merely ensure that there is a 'split recommendation' and then the minister should discuss the matter in the government committee meetings:

The permanent secretary takes up the fight if they know it's important to me. But otherwise there must be a 'split recommendation'; that is to say, if the Ministry of Foreign Affairs wants this and the Ministry of Finance wants that, then you have to take the 'fight' politically. If it isn't a departmental battle, then we must take it up to the political level and take the political discussion (M 3).

While the permanent secretaries agree that they should represent their respective ministers and that the ministers should discuss the political aspects of a case if there are disagreements, the permanent secretaries place much greater emphasis on the other aspects of case preparation, such as the quality of the *fachwissen* and the 'readability' of a case.

15.3 After the preparatory government committee meetings

PREPARE THE MINISTER FOR GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE MEETINGS. The permanent secretaries also emphasize the preparatory government committees as a forum that enables them to prime their minister for the government committee meetings to follow. First, the permanent secretaries tell of how the meetings enable them to present the themes in the discussion for the minister, so the minister can consider their position before the government committee meeting. As Permanent Secretary 17 explains:

Then, of course, my job is to go back to my minister afterwards and prepare her to a reasonable degree before she enters the government committee by saying, 'You need to be aware of these issues. You should probably just make up your mind in relation to this issue, because it's central to this case. And so on' (PS 17).

The permanent secretaries sometimes also discuss points to pay attention to in meetings, as illustrated in excerpt 15.6 below. After the discussion of the fourth item on the agenda, the PM's permanent secretary points out some of the parts of the material that the other permanent secretaries should ensure that their respective ministers are aware of.

Excerpt 15.6. Where can the minister focus their reading (FKU part 4)

According to the PM's permanent secretary, the fourth item on the agenda (a budget item from the Ministry of Finance) is a little more 'bureaucratically heavy' than item 3. The Ministry of Finance permanent secretary is otherwise trying to convince the others that it is a rather juicy item on the agenda, which makes everyone around the table laugh. The mood is good. The Ministry of Finance permanent secretary asks the other permanent secretaries to look up some specific slides, which he then talks about. The floor is then free, and the other permanent secretaries comment on the paper when the PM's permanent secretary gives them the floor. At the end of the agenda item, the PM's permanent secretary summarizes, concluding that when they each talk to their respective ministers, it would be a good idea to show them the figures on pages 8 and 14. They nod around the table and take notes. The meeting continues.

Besides the written material, many permanent secretaries write notes when the Ministry of Finance permanent secretary elaborates on the material; and similarly when getting advice on what pages ministers should pay particular attention to. The regular members of the government committees, especially the Finance Committee and Coordination Committee, are presented with extensive amounts of written materials on a daily basis. Hence, it can be really

useful when the permanent secretary, or others, can help them to focus their attention on the most important parts of the (already condensed) material.

Second, the preparatory government committee meetings can make other ministers' positions on the case known and present other ministries' arguments for their suggestions. Knowing this enables the permanent secretary to prepare their minister about the other positions they might encounter in the government committee. This allows the minister to consider these arguments and to take their own position on the issue – and potentially to come up with counter-arguments beforehand. Permanent Secretary 10 explains it like this:

Then, thirdly, my role is to find out what the other ministers' positions are. In order to help the minister to ease the case into the right place, so when it enters the K-committee [Coordination Committee], I should preferably be able to say to her: 'I think the Minister of Finance will say that he thinks it's too expensive. I can hear the permanent secretary saying, 'this and that' ... and to that, you can say, 'X and Y' (PS 10).

Overall, the permanent members of the preparatory government committees have broader knowledge about what is going on in the ministries. This inside information can also be helpful when preparing the minister on other cases: knowledge about how other ministries argue and information about other cases running simultaneously are useful when commenting on other cases and a good source of advice on political strategy.

CHANGING GOVERNMENTS, CHANGING ROLES? According to the permanent secretaries, the function of the preparatory government committees varies, depending on the government structure. Multiple parties usually make up a ruling coalition in Denmark. The crux of the matter is whether the government is a one-party or a multi-party government; that is, whether the ministers come from the same party or from different parties. During the preparatory government committee meetings, the permanent secretaries argue that they should represent their minister. When the government consists of ministers from different political parties, representing the minister is also associated with representing a certain party. One minister mentions how having a multi-party government means that the permanent secretaries must be aware of which ministries have a minister from the same party as their minister and be particularly aware of collaborating with those ministries.

... In a multi-party government (...) we sit to a significant extent and look after that party's interests in government coordination. Partly to express what they mean and advance their arguments. Try to push solutions and the conclusion in their direction. (...) In a single-party government, that role is removed from the equation (PS 5).

The internal coordination is therefore a more complex equation with a multi-party government, where permanent secretaries not only have to balance their ministers' respective positions towards the other ministries but must also take the position of the different political parties into account. Concurrently, the permanent secretaries argue that they should try to find a suggestion to a compromise if possible.

Typically in a multi-party government, there may be different parties and they may have different positions. Can you find some compromises to move forward? There, all of the permanent secretaries typically have some idea about what their minister thinks. And then you can see if you can find something [compromise, AT]. And then we can ask the ministers, 'Could there be a compromise there?' (PS 11).

The permanent secretaries are still working on finding compromises. The big shift is the fact that the permanent secretaries are suddenly not only representing a ministry and a minister with (personal) opinions. To a greater extent, the permanent secretaries have to also fight for the specific party to which their minister belongs because of how they represent their minister. While underlining the importance of trying to find a compromise, the permanent secretaries stress that political problems require political solutions. This entails that the political positions can be written in the case file along with the possible consequences, but the permanent secretaries should leave political disagreements to politicians.

15.4 Government committee meetings

After the issue has been discussed in the preparatory government committee meetings, the case can be put on the agenda for the government committee meetings. This is the ministers' meeting, to which some permanent secretaries are occasionally invited (usually to be able to assist the minister with technical details, if necessary).

PROVIDING FACHWISSEN. While government committee meetings are generally for ministers, the permanent secretaries sometimes participate in these internal government meetings. I have not observed any of these meetings, but based on the interviews there were some interesting points relating specifically to this meeting type.

During the government committee meetings, there seems to be a strong, prevailing norm that the permanent secretaries are merely observers; they only participate in discussions if invited to do so by their minister. The degree to which the permanent secretaries are invited to participate differs, based on the individual minister's preferences:

It varies a lot, highly dependent on the ministers, whether they like to speak for themselves all the time or think, ‘now we’re moving into something more technical, so I can just give the floor to the permanent secretary’ (PS 16).

It also differs based on the type of government. The current PM has a strong focus on ensuring that the civil servants are not taking over the ministers’ tasks. Hence, the ministers are requested to speak for themselves and to be visible as ministers, only giving the word to the permanent secretary in technical matters or other things related to *fachwissen*. While this seem to be the role in general, one might imagine that the minister is even more hesitant to request the permanent secretary’s assistance during the current government for this reason.

In general, the permanent secretaries explain this role as providing professional, technical advice based on *fachwissen*:

You sit there as the one with professional, technical knowledge. That is, if we go into our area and the minister is suddenly questioned about specific matters or about more organizational or operational questions or whatever, then the minister will expect to be able to look to me, and then I speak up. While she herself manages the matters which sets the political direction (PS 17).

Hence, there are high demands regarding the knowledge of permanent secretaries of their remit. While the minister is expected to possess some degree of knowledge of their remit, the permanent secretaries are expected to have extensive knowledge:

When I sit with the government, I must also be able to answer everything possible, i.e. the technical substance. And that’s the hassle here – particularly for me – that we encompass a great many things, and then you really have to know your stuff. The ministers aren’t expected to know all of the technical details – you don’t have to be able to [as minister, AT]. I’m there for that kind of thing. So I also need to know things (PS 11).

This places demands on the permanent secretaries’ preparation before the meeting, especially because of the unpredictability of the questions, ranging from technical details to previous ministry initiatives – maybe even specific phrasings in bills past or present:

I prepare myself to the extreme. It’s like having to take an exam every time, because they can ask questions about anything. My role it is to be a technical lifeline for the minister (PS 10).

It varies how much preparation the permanent secretaries need before a government committee meeting. Nevertheless, they must be prepared to answer a great range of questions on the subject in question.

WHAT WAS THE DECISION? Another important role after a government committee meeting, which multiple permanent secretaries mention, is to help the minister figure out what was actually decided at the meeting.

like understanding and hearing the sentences (...) and helping to try to figure out what it was so that was decided afterwards. It isn't always 100% clear (PS 36).

This is often trickier than it sounds. The minister sometimes seems to conclude what they want from the meeting, without really considering the limitations that were part of the mandate given.

According to the Danish Constitution, a minister can do what they want within their remit. For many decades, however, the tradition has been to have government committees, where important policy initiatives are processed and discussed. The result is often that the minister receives a green light to continue the work towards some more or less specific end goal, and the members of the government committee give a mandate to the specific minister. According to the Constitution, however, the mandate is not theirs to give. In practice, the minister will usually comply with the mandate given and return to the government committee for a new mandate if there are major changes. As one permanent secretary explains:

Then it's also to listen. In principle – that is, according to the constitution – the minister can do whatever she wants. But in a sense, you go over there and get a mandate. And that's not just what's on the paper. It's just as much what's being said in the room. What did they agree about and where do we go from here? It's also very important that you're there as an extra set of ears. What was the decision? Or, it's not a formal decision, because they don't have the authority to make decisions, but what did they think would be the right thing that the minister went home and did? (PS 35).

Further along the lines of becoming familiar with participation in specific decisions, one can also get more familiar with the government's line of thought in general. This enables one to give more nuanced advice to the minister in other situations:

The most important thing is to hear the discussions, so I know where the government is in general. Of course on the specific issue, but you can also generalize a lot from the debate. That's probably what I've benefitted the most from (PS 36).

The majority of the empirical material is collected during a single-party government, which has an impact on the role of the permanent secretaries.

15.5 Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the practices and roles of permanent secretaries in the preparatory government committee meetings. In my experience, the permanent secretaries are balancing multiple, potentially conflicting, considerations. They represent their minister's voice while also representing the ministry and the *fachwissen* that the ministry represents. Furthermore, the permanent secretaries are concerned with the government as a whole and in ensuring that the written material is accessible for other ministers and that they provide an accurate presentation of the issue. While these issues might conflict, the group of permanent secretaries collaborates on finding the right balance before presenting materials and arguments to the minister. Hence, participation in the meetings also enables the permanent secretaries to pass on information about the other ministries' points of view, thus assisting the minister in their preparation for the government committee meeting (e.g. finding counterarguments). The majority of the material has been collected during a single-party government, which, as shown, can affect the role played by the permanent secretaries in the preparatory government committees, as permanent secretaries do not have to take disagreements between parties into consideration when trying to craft compromises. This does not mean the ministers agree on the issues – far from. However, the party-politics game seems to be different during one-party governments.

The preparatory government committee meetings have previously been shrouded in mystery, and some ministers have been very sceptical about the format. At no point in my fieldwork did I experience permanent secretaries trying to push an agenda that deviated from the discussion I heard them have with their minister or other civil servants when discussing the issue within their own ministry. Quite the contrary. Hence, the empirical material from observations and interviews points to permanent secretaries filling the role as steward more than agent. The permanent secretaries are granted discretionary space to act on their minister's behalf in the preparatory government committee meetings. The devotion to discuss the cases in the preparatory government committee meetings is the opposite of increasing slack. Thus, the work towards finding a solution that will benefit their own ministerial remit and promote the minister's opinion seems more in line with the motives described in stewardship theory.

Chapter 16.

Media

This chapter concerns the involvement of permanent secretaries in the handling of the media, their take on their own appearance in the media, and the influence of the media on their daily work. The permanent secretaries tell of how the media pressure has increased in recent years and how ministries have set up press units in response. With the rise of the press units, the special advisors are less involved in managing the media than previously. While the permanent secretaries are not involved in all media requests, they are involved in handling important media stories. It is difficult to specify exactly what that means, but it does involve a certain degree of salience for the minister and/or ministry, such as something that threatens the ministry's reputation. Even when permanent secretaries are involved in the handling of media stories, they usually remain out of the spotlight. The main reason seems to be that the minister should represent the ministry and be the face of the ministry; hence, the minister should comment on media stories, unless there is a need for *fachwissen*. In such cases, the agency head makes a media appearance. There are indications of a shift in this regard and the permanent secretaries increasingly appearing in the media on the grounds that, as some permanent secretaries suggest, as the highest-ranked civil servant in the ministerial hierarchy, they ought to represent the ministry in public. Finally, this chapter also illustrates how the permanent secretary's daily schedule totally changes when the ministry is frontpage news, which trickles down throughout the ministry, also affecting the daily agenda of many of the other civil servants in the ministry. Such developments appear to occur at the expense of the daily management of the ministry and the operations that are normally taking place.

ENHANCED MEDIA PRESSURE. Many interviewees mention how the pace of the media has increased, which has also resulted in increased media pressure. This quote explains these mechanisms, as seen from the civil servant perspective:

But there is – the pace has also gone up a lot. Even though they were also busy 20 years ago, the press and social media and all that... It just means that there's more pressure all the time (PS 8).

This is manifest in the coverage of the everyday casework and the extent to which politicians are able to immerse themselves in the political substance. As Permanent Secretary 14 explains:

Society has evolved, and if I should mention a shift in the last 10 years, it's more... an extreme external pressure from the media, where there's enormous pressure on the systems in relation to the coverage of cases. (...) The media put pressure on ministers and stakeholders and politicians – the Folketing. Something has happened in the last 10 years. As far as I know, this is also the case in other countries (PS 14).

In general, permanent secretaries refer to the increased media pressure as a circumstance that must be recognized but also something they just need to deal with.

HOW THE MEDIA PRESSURE MANIFESTS ITSELF. The pressure exerted by the media becomes evident in three ways. First, the media continually demand answers from the politicians. The media cycle runs at such a high pace that there is not necessarily time to wait a day or two for an official comment from the ministry or minister. The ministry must therefore continuously be prepared to answer all sorts of questions at short notice. This is valid for permanent secretaries and for the remaining civil servants, who will most likely receive a call from the permanent secretary if they do not know the answer. As Head of Division 3 explains:

I think the media and so on mean that the political pace is running so high that the minister always has to be 'on' [i.e. can never take a break, AT], and new answers are constantly demanded of them. So it's a little like politics on doping (HoD 3).

This seemingly never-ending demand for answers and comments from the politicians also exerts pressure on the civil service. Second, the politicians are always chasing the next frontpage (and their opportunity to shine). There seems to be a considerable focus among politicians on media attention and positive media appearances. Hence, the politicians focus on appearing vigorous and getting things done (i.e., laws enacted). As mentioned in the chapter on handling cases (Chapter 13), this can entail less focus on case preparation and less focus on implementation of legislation.

This does not happen when you get legislation through the Folketing. That's where it starts. And if you haven't done your basic work well enough and made sure that the people who have to carry it out afterwards are on board, then you might as well just not do it. And there, it can be a little... It's a lot about those frontpages rather than the substance (HoD 3).

This focus can be problematic for the civil servants due to the constant pressure to assist the politicians with the constant stream of new ideas. Thirdly, the media pressure manifests itself in how the Folketing works; that is, the

minister is asked parliamentary questions and expected to participate in committee hearings. To do so, the minister requires help from their permanent secretary and the other civil servants:

The media image also affects how the Folketing works and how members of the Folketing work. They demand and expect answers from the minister, the minister must show up and be ready. The permanent secretary is also met by the same pressure. My point is that it isn't a personal, unpleasant pressure from a minister towards a permanent secretary; it's just as much in the political reality – that the expectations and requirements for how fast one can react are very high. And that is then felt in what is expected of the permanent secretaries – that's my experience (HoD 14).

As mentioned in the quote, the politicians not only require an answer, they also want it *fast*. This relates to the fourth point, namely that the increased media pressure trickles down throughout the ministry, affecting the entire civil service. Several civil servants, especially the division heads, point to how the increasing number of cases in general and an increasing focus on specific cases in the media along with increased case complexity have led to greater pressure on the system in general. This pressure trickles down throughout the ministerial hierarchy, as the permanent secretaries have many different tasks to attend to, and many permanent secretaries experience restraints on their time made by their minister. Head of Division 11 explains this using a pressure cooker analogy: When there is pressure, the air needs to escape somehow, somewhere. In the ministry, pushing down the system is the only way to relieve the pressure in the top:

There are so many cases now. The complexity has increased. There is now so much media pressure from some newspapers – that no one reads, it's such a paradox – and some TV broadcasts (that no one watches). It's a really strong paradox, I think. It just means that the pressure on the permanent secretary has increased significantly. It's like a pressure cooker: when there's pressure, the air has to get out, and the pressure pushes downwards in the system. We can feel that, too (HoD 11).

Thus, the chances are that if there is increased pressure in the top of the ministry, it is also felt throughout the lower parts of the ministerial hierarchy.

PRESS HANDLING IN THE MINISTRIES. Multiple permanent secretaries point out how there are now press units that are handling the media on an everyday basis. This reflects the professionalization of media management that has taken place in the Danish central administration in the past 10–20 years:

Ministries today are far better at dealing with the press than was the case 10 years ago. For the media have a much larger presence. Today, many ministries have a press department assisting the minister and handling the media work. It has become part of the ministries' everyday work, and it must be handled professionally just like the ministry's other work (PS 18).

Permanent Secretary 14 makes a very similar statement, emphasizing that this development is connected to the heightened media pressure:

10 years ago, there might have been a single press officer. Now there are just many, many more. And that corresponds to the external pressure that is now felt. We have to be able to respond 24/7. We need to be able to explain [to the minister, AT] why there's a case – and five minutes later, you'll have the minister in [the media]. It has been a massive increase (PS 14).

Permanent Secretary 18 also emphasizes how, parallel with the professionalization of the press units, the character of the special advisor has shifted from *media* advisors to *political* advisors (see Chapter 10 on special advisors for an elaboration on the role as special advisor).

There has also been a change in relation to the minister's special advisor – in the past, they were typically media advisors. Today, they're political advisors (PS 18).

This is also visible in the excerpt 16.1 below, where the special advisor plays a remarkably limited role in collaborating with the permanent secretary in a case where the ministry's policy is frontpage news.

Excerpt 16.1 illustrates a situation where the head of the press unit is discussing how the press reacted to a specific initiative within the ministerial remit. Two things are important to notice. First, the permanent secretary seems very well-informed about the media coverage on television and in the newspaper, and they participate actively in the discussion, posing specific questions to the press unit manager. Concurrently, the permanent secretary calls for the presence of the ministry and the minister, initiating a discussion about what the next step can be to ensure that the minister and ministry receive positive coverage. Second, neither the special advisor nor the minister was present.

Excerpt 16.1. Media coverage'

The permanent secretary, the head of the press, a press officer, an office manager, the permanent secretary's secretary sits around the table. A few minutes after the meeting starts, a head of division enters.

There is introductory chatter about another issue before the topic shifts to the media coverage of a new initiative presented yesterday. The press manager says that the media were active last night and that the initiative is mentioned positively (e.g., by the spokespersons from the various parties). It received good coverage because there was little else on the programme yesterday. The press officer states that it went well in the '18.30' (the 6:30 pm TV news), and the permanent secretary agrees. They continue, talking about the coverage in the other TV news, including the involvement of spokespersons and interest groups. A regular commentator's remark that the media angle is wrong when some media notice that the stakeholders are not involved is particularly well received. After discussing the TV coverage, they turn to the newspapers of the day. The permanent secretary remarks, questioningly, that both *Jyllands-Posten* and *Politiken* talk to the spokespersons, but that he cannot see the minister or the ministry in the statements. The press chief confirms, noting that Ritzau also does not have an angle focusing on the minister or ministry. They discuss what the strategy should be moving forward, such as how to ensure that the minister and ministry also get some of the spotlight.

In this instance, the permanent secretary and head of press unit are concerned with ensuring that the minister gets their share of the limelight. During my fieldwork, however, I also encountered instances when they discussed with the minister if and when the minister should leave the limelight to the political spokespersons; they also need recognition for their work, so the minister sometimes lets political spokespersons get the credit for different accomplishments in negotiations.

PERMANENT SECRETARY INVOLVEMENT. The media involvement of permanent secretaries varies, and some follow the media closer than others. One permanent secretary tells of how they follow the news quite closely and read the next day's newspapers before going to sleep. The same permanent secretary has asked the press unit to be kept informed about who the minister has spoken to, when, and about what:

The media takes up a lot of space in the sense that I follow them very closely, because I think that's my duty when I have to advise the minister. The minister is also following it very closely. And I'm such a nerd, so I read all the newspapers in the evening before going to bed and know what's going on the next morning.

And I ask the press unit to keep me closely informed about who the minister has spoken to, when and so on (PS 10).

As several permanent secretaries point out, however, there are issues that escape the attention of the permanent secretary – they are simply too small – and should be handled by the press unit:

After all, a completely integral part of providing counsel to the minister is being able to prepare them – either for proactive action in the media or reactive. It's not my decision how much that takes – there are others who decide that. But it's a fixed part of the Ministry's counsel – to prepare the minister. We have so many media inquiries, also about individual cases, small things and so on. So we have an arrangement, whereby I don't see all of the quotes the minister provides for anything and everything, but only where there's something a little more important, somehow or another. And of course it's important that those working with the press in the house assess it correctly. They have to ask themselves: 'When does the permanent secretary want to actually see it before we send it?' (PS 16).

Permanent Secretary 15 elaborates on when they consider it especially important to step in as permanent secretary and take active part in the process: namely, when the criticism is levelled at the ministry:

Most press cases can run without me having to get involved in them. But if it's sufficiently important: if it's really on the minister's mind or if someone is starting to 'attack' the ministry and so on. (...) Well, then I have to get involved. Then I have to spend time on it: What should we think about it? How should we deal with it and how should we act on it? (PS 15).

However, this is not the only reason for the permanent secretary to engage in the handling of specific cases. They will also get involved if it is important for the minister.

While the permanent secretaries' engagement in media stories might vary, the permanent secretaries generally have to stay on top of the media agenda. Not least because 'the media means for my day of work what they mean for the minister's day of work' (PS 16). And more often than not, that is a lot. The excerpt below elaborates on how the permanent secretaries try to remain atop the news: reading next day's newspaper before going to bed, the press unit's brief of media stories from the last 24 hours, or flicking through the pages of one or more newspapers in the front office; time allowing, which was rarely the case.

Excerpt 16.2. Being on top of the news

‘Did you read the news this weekend?’, ‘Did you hear the radio news this morning?’ and ‘Did you read the *Altinget* article, where...’ Permanent secretaries always seem to have incredibly good control of what had happened in their area in the news. Some also have various newspapers lying in their front office, which they read on occasion. They also have multiple subscriptions and are able to read most newspapers on their iPads, able to read the next day’s newspaper before going to bed. And then there was the overview of news from the pres unit. On one day, I was able to take a closer look at the media overview, which contained a column, newspaper and links to 148 articles that to a greater or lesser extent relate to the ministry’s area and were published the day before and up until 6:10 am of the day in question.

The daily headlines could hint at whether the schedule for the day would be very different from the printed calendar I received the day before (hint: it almost always was very different). The impact of the media on the daily schedule is further elaborated below.

MEDIA AS WARNING SYSTEM. One permanent secretary refers to the ‘canary in a coalmine’ metaphor in relation to media attention and parliamentary questions:

I use a lot – we do so as a whole as management – Folketing questions, press stories, and complaints from citizens – we usually refer to them as canaries. Like in the old days in mines: Is there any bad air here? (PS 3).

While only one permanent secretary directly mentions using media attention in this manner, it seems plausible that other permanent secretaries use the media similarly.

HOW THE MEDIA CAN CHANGE THE AGENDA. During my fieldwork, I experienced how media stories affected the daily schedule, including the meeting agendas of already scheduled meetings. The civil servants would discuss the media’s take on the story and draft a response. Decision would have to be made as to whether the minister or civil servants should respond. Second, this usually entailed new meetings about the media story and how the ministry was handling it, which could involve a range of different civil servants. Third, it would affect the meetings with external stakeholders and political spokespersons.

In this section, excerpts 16.3 and 16.4 concern the handling of a specific story that made the ministry frontpage news. The excerpt illustrates how being on the front page permeates a day in the ministry; it takes time and attention

away from other current cases and usually involves a broader range of civil servants. The reader should be aware that the excerpts are only based on the permanent secretary's involvement in the case; that is, any direct coordination between the press unit and the agency head, the head of division, the special advisor or the minister is not part of my notes.

The excerpt on Day One illustrates how media work swallows up time. The initial thoughts about drafting the response are first discussed at a morning meeting, and the entire day is used to complete them. Nevertheless, the civil servant from the press unit ends up running out of the permanent secretary's office at the last minute to send the reply in time.

Excerpt 16.3. Frontpage news, Day One

There is a meeting in the permanent secretary's office between department and agency. From the department, in addition to the permanent secretary, there are three division heads and the head of unit for the ministerial and management secretariat. The agency is represented by the agency director and four civil servants. The agency director speaks first, beginning with an item that is not on the agenda: the ministry is on the front page of a major newspaper today. The permanent secretary and the agency director talk about what the story is about before getting started with the agenda.

(...) Later in the morning, the agency director returns to the permanent secretary's office in connection with another meeting. They are again discussing how the ministry should react – and whether the agency should report anything.

(...) In the afternoon, the permanent secretary asks one of the secretaries if the press has responded to the media case. The secretary confirms that the press department is running the case itself.

(...) 20 minutes later, an official from the press department is half-running into the permanent secretary's office. The permanent secretary's secretary is already in office, and all three are now bent over a draft to a press release. 'The minister must say something about ...' the permanent secretary starts, and elaborates on this and makes a few further changes to the press release. The permanent secretary wraps things up by noting that there are only two minutes to the deadline, and the press officer runs out of the office.

The draft also reveals the permanent secretary's degree of involvement in drafting the response and writing the quotes from the minister, including last-minute changes. It should also be noted that the special advisor plays a role, albeit not as significant a role as one might expect.

Excerpt 16.4 below concerns the second day after the frontpage story. It shows how the permanent secretary is interrupted many times throughout the

day with questions about it, and the course of events illustrates the continuous collaboration between minister and civil service, underlining how the special advisor is important regarding the media but not the main actor (see Chapter 10 on special advisors). In this case, the minister makes comments on the case, but the head of division is also in direct contact with the journalist repeatedly throughout the day to discuss facts of the case (they believe there are factual errors in the article, which the journalist ultimately corrects). In this case, the permanent secretary is not in direct contact with the journalist, instead providing advice both to the head of division and minister on the case.

Excerpt 16.4. Frontpage news, Day Two

(...) When I meet at 8:00 am, a head of division and press officer are stepping out of the permanent secretary's office. They have held a meeting about the press case, approx. 15 minutes, and the head of division and permanent secretary head down to the minister to discuss the matter with them.

(...) After lunch, the head of division returns to the permanent secretary's office. They discuss the criticism of the ministry and their strategy moving forward.

(...) 10 minutes later, a press officer enters the permanent secretary's office to give a status. The press officer says that there is a demand for background information from the ministry, after which they discuss the minister's press strategy.

(...) Early in the afternoon, the permanent secretary meets with the minister. The minister notes that the press officer has done a good job. The minister says that you can hear from the talk at Christiansborg that they have read what the press officer has written. The first point is then to pick up on the latest material they have received in connection with the case. The permanent secretary presents the minister with a summary and looks on as the minister reads. The permanent secretary then presents a proposal for what should be done moving forward.

(...) In the middle of the afternoon, the head of division and the office manager gather again in the permanent secretary's office. The permanent secretary talks about the minister's thoughts and shares what he has told the minister. They go on to talk about the process moving forward should be forward-looking and what should be set in motion in the ministry.

(...) Later in the afternoon, the press officer and the head of division re-enter the permanent secretary's office. They're only there for 5 minutes, where the head of division says that he has spoken to some of the media, but that the conversation quickly becomes technical.

(...) Half an hour after the meeting is over, the head of division is back in the permanent secretary's office. The head of division has talked to a journalist and briefs the permanent secretary about the conversation.

(...) 10 minutes later, the head of division is back in the permanent secretary's office, now with another civil servants. The civil servants says that the media would like to talk to someone from the ministry. The permanent secretary asks if the media will talk to the minister. The head of division thinks so. The civil servants and the permanent secretary are on their way out the door again, as the permanent secretary, half-shouting, asks the head of division if there is a quote on the way. The division head definitely thinks so. The permanent secretary reminds him that they must have it before six o'clock.

(...) Late in the afternoon, the division head is back in the permanent secretary's office and reads something aloud. The permanent secretary thinks it's a little too 'internal'. At that moment, the press officer enters. The permanent secretary asks why they have taken an argument out. The head of department explains why.

(...) The head of division leaves, only to return a few minutes later. He says that he has told the journalist that he expects to be told if there is concrete criticism of the ministry so that the ministry can respond concretely. The head of division leaves again.

(...) Half an hour later, the head of division comes back and says that he is going home but that they can get hold of him via his mobile. He also mentions that the journalist has now corrected the factually incorrect details in the article.

What is less visible from this excerpt is that meetings were rescheduled for this reason. The story in the media affected the minister and could potentially harm the ministry's reputation, and less salient matters on the permanent secretary's calendar were therefore cancelled. Among other things, a 'regular' meeting¹⁸ with many civil servants from one of the units in the ministry was rescheduled. This meeting concerned the daily management of the ministry.

The excerpt illustrates how a media story can impact the permanent secretary's day of work. It shifts the focus in the ministry towards managing the news story, which may affect the tasks concerning day-to-day management because they do not require immediate attention. Should this occur too often, it might have negative consequences for the daily management of the ministry.

16.1 The permanent secretary's own media appearance

All permanent secretaries agree that, with a few exceptions to which I will return, they should stay out of the media. In their everyday life, the minister should be the one to make comments to the media. It seems like the rule of

¹⁸ The meeting was supposed to happen with a fixed interval.

thumb is that if the permanent secretary went to the media and said something very wise, then the minister should have said it. And if the permanent secretary say something stupid, then they should not have said anything at all. While recognizing that the permanent secretaries should ‘remain in the shadow’ of the minister, Permanent Secretary 5 emphasizes the importance of ensuring that they are not completely unapproachable for their surroundings:

After all, permanent secretaries never become rock stars. And they don’t have to be rock stars. I’m fine with living in the shadows. It just can’t be completely closed (PS 5).

In short, there is a broad agreement that permanent secretaries should leave the limelight to their ministers. But what are the exceptions? Based on my material, there don’t seem to be many. Perhaps two exceptions, as mentioned briefly by Permanent Secretary 1: permanent secretaries should make the news when they begin in the position and when they leave the position.

There was once someone who said that a permanent secretary should be in the newspaper when they start and when they stop. That might be a bit of a wise crack – once in a while, you will appear in the media (PS 1).

The interest in avoiding the media is enhanced by the fact that one of the things that typically puts permanent secretaries on the frontpage is their involvement in a scandal (the so-called *møgsager* or *lortesager*).

My own relation with the media, aside from the fact that I try to stay out of it as much as possible. As you have probably seen, it is typically the case that when there’s a permanent secretary on the frontpage in the media, it’s because there is a really rotten case (PS 10).

Some permanent secretaries find situations difficult to navigate because they are not trained to do so. While they can receive competent feedback from the press unit, they still need to venture into it:

If, for one reason or another, you get into trouble, then you must be able to handle it in a fairly proper and offensive manner. Obviously, it’s a challenge, because I don’t have much training in it. But then you just have to throw yourself into it. And then of course use the expertise we have in the ministry to help you with how to communicate your message best (PS 5).

Still, a couple of permanent secretaries mention situations where it can be legitimate to give comments to the press as permanent secretary. First, if the ministry’s reputation, analytical models or something of that nature is attacked in the media, it can be fine to defend the ministry in public. However, the strategy varies from situation to situation, and if the content is too political, the minister will probably still handle it. Permanent Secretary 38 explains:

We occasionally comment on specific cases. Typically, we make a statement when the professionalism of the house is being questioned: if people are saying that a calculation is incorrect or we are somehow affected by some kind of technical discussion (PS 38).

Another permanent secretary argues that it is important to take the role as the ministry's administrative representative upon oneself. This entails explaining the ministry's mission to the public and representing the ministry:

The Prime Minister's closest administrative advisor [the permanent secretary, AT] is probably a role where you aren't going to be in the limelight. But for the rest of us, where you largely represent a machine, it applies to everyone from the Ministry of Finance on down. For them, I think it's actually healthy to be able to show the flag and explain to the public what we're actually doing (PS 7).

Hence, this permanent secretary emphasizes the importance of representing the ministry in public while simultaneously acknowledging that this should happen in relation to the daily managing of the ministry and not in relation to political aspects.

16.2 Conclusion

The pace and intensity of the media coverage has increased during the past 10 years. Concurrently, the ministries have rearmed the ministries with press units to handle media demands. The press units thus handle minor and standard requests, but if a story is large enough, other parts of the civil servants will be involved in the reaction. Hence, the media agenda affects the daily operations in the ministry. Being on the front page can clear parts of (or almost entire) days in the permanent secretary's calendar (and the minister), taking time away from other tasks, often tasks related to the ministry's daily operations. If a story is big, it takes many resources from the civil service. Regardless, the permanent secretaries usually spend time keeping up to date with the media because they consider doing so to be important to provide counsel to the minister.

In general, the minister should be the face of the ministry. If a question is very technical or directly concerning *fachwissen*, then an agency director will probably answer. In general, it is very difficult to figure out where the line is between permanent secretaries getting involved and the permanent secretaries leaving a story to the press unit. Hence, it is difficult to formulate general principles for the permanent secretaries' involvement in the handling of media attention. It is an assessment made from story to story, based on an interplay between several factors. The most important factors seem to be the salience to the minister (e.g., key issue or something that can threaten their position) and

whether the ministry is criticized (e.g., criticism of civil servants). If the ministry is involved in a scandal, it can also become necessary for the permanent secretary to defend the ministry.

Some permanent secretaries argue that they should sometimes appear in the media to represent the ministry – at least regarding the daily operations, such as organizational changes and methods of calculation. Several permanent secretaries notice that when they appear in the media, it is often in connection with some kind of error in the ministry.

Hence, media attention affects the everyday lives of permanent secretaries and is often very unpredictable. The permanent secretaries are sometimes deeply involved in the ministry's handling of the cases and sometimes they are barely involved, but it is difficult to come up with a rule of thumb as to whether it is the case.

Chapter 17.

Interest organizations

This chapter concerns the collaboration with interest organizations. I clarify why the collaboration with interest organizations is important and how the civil servants and the minister can benefit from this collaboration. This is followed by a section on how the collaboration works in practice. It illustrates how the hierarchy influences the type of contact, how the ministry's presence can affect the collaboration (which interest organizations to include, how often, who participated), and finally, how the contact between permanent secretaries and interest organizations is expected and important for delivering good bases upon which the minister can make decisions.

17.1 Why collaborate with interest organizations?

PROFESSIONALIZATION OF INTEREST ORGANIZATIONS. Interest organizations are important actors to which civil servants must respond in their everyday work. They can put pressure on the ministries through collaboration with other politicians and through connections to parliamentary committees. The importance of these actors has grown to the point where they now constitute an inevitable boundary condition for the work of permanent secretaries, as reflected in the quote below:

Professionalization of the stakeholders has taken place to an extreme degree. (...) The stakeholders and interest groups have achieved significant results and are better at understanding what they're playing into and putting pressure on the government in relation to having contact with politicians and committees. This is massive change. Especially if you saw, like [how] this ministry has run into some cases, then, among other things, the public access to documents feels very intense. Extreme pressure on the system, so to speak. That's not criticism. It's simply a framework condition, and it has just really, really changed over the last 10 years (PS 34).

The perceived professionalization of interest organizations arguably makes it even more important to be able to engage with interest organizations. Involving them in policy development may prevent hurdles (e.g., §20-questions) when moving forward with the policy initiative.

WHY IS THIS CONTACT IMPORTANT? There is agreement among the top civil servants that the contact with interest organizations is essential: 'After all, it enables me to help the minister' (*Det sætter jo mig i stand til at hjælpe*

ministeren; PS 2). The interviewees present many different ways of collaborating with and using the knowledge from interest organizations. In the following, I list six of them.

First, regular contact provides civil servants with information on the present circumstances from the interest organizations' point of view – also referred to as 'the real world'. This provides opportunity to get a sense of the lay of the land and to be informed 'when something's wrong' (PS 2), and it simply allows the civil servants to remain abreast of the course of events:

It can, for example, be warnings about things that will happen. So for example, I have an expectation that at 3 pm this afternoon, the chairman of [specific council] will resign. That's an example of an early warning (HoD 10).

Receiving such early warnings allows civil servants to prepare a reaction from the ministry or minister before an event occurs.

Second, interest organizations can be useful in terms of pinpointing potential problems lurking in the longer term, enabling the ministry to begin strategically addressing such future challenges. As Permanent Secretary 2 explains:

The work in such a ministry is highly influenced by what is the current agenda. Some of what we work with is, well, how do we get better at spending just a small part of our time being more innovative, more strategic, more forward-looking in our perspective? And that's also something we cultivate with the organizations. To say, 'Okay, what are the main challenges we need to address in five years? And how can we prepare for that in a good way?' (PS 2).

The civil service can initiate the work of handling the issues without having to jump to conclusions or making rushed decisions.

Third, incorporating interest organizations in the development of new policy would appear to have become very standard. Several civil servants mention the importance of involving interest organizations (and other external stakeholders) in the development of new policy initiatives, especially when working with the very comprehensive policy initiatives. The interviewees point to the fact that interest organizations are involved in different stages of the process of developing new initiatives, among other things because they often have very specific knowledge and expertise:

And then of course they're also involved in the ongoing policy development and get their professional input included. That's out of respect for the fact that they know something we don't (HoD 10).

Another reason for involving interest organizations is that doing so makes it more difficult for the interest organizations subsequently to criticize the gov-

ernment if they have had a hand in developing the policy. Thus, the involvement also helps to ensure that the organizations will praise the initiative; or at least that their criticism will be that much more muted. Even in the cases where the civil servants cannot accommodate the interests of the interest organizations, it is still important to engage with them and listen to their input.

When you know that people can be critical, then invite them in, talk to them, let them tell you what they're critical of. It's not certain that you can accommodate them. It can be political if you want something else – that the minister wants something else. But to be open to others and their perspective. (...) It's about listening to... now, we always say 'the real world', but listening to different industries – of course they also have politics and something they want. But what's underneath? What are the problems in what they're talking about? (HoD 2).

This quote emphasizes how the courses of action and policy initiatives are ultimately political decisions. And in this sense, the interest organizations might not get to have it their way, but their involvement can nevertheless be useful to ensure that what they find problematic is heard.

Fourth, one civil servant tells of how early contact with interest organizations, on top of providing information about the organization's position on an issue, can be used to develop arguments against the very same interest organization. Knowing the organization's arguments enables the civil servants to prepare the minister's answers in response to expected criticism:

It can be in a matter where ... so there will be a division of labour with the minister, of course, but where we can go in, for example, with some policy proposal (...) ¹⁹ Then, I've tested some things, some models, on interest groups in advance. It's about preparing argument – or at least being able to tell the minister, 'Here's where the organizations will compromise' (HoD 10).

Thus, knowing more about the potential criticism from interest organizations enables the preparation of counterarguments.

Fifth, if the interest organization's interests are aligned with the ministry, the collaboration can also strengthen the ability of the interest organizations to exert pressure on other political parties. This can indirectly help a minister to achieve their political goals. I encountered several different courses of political negotiations during my fieldwork. Excerpt 17.1 is an example of a situation in which the permanent secretary has had continuous contact with the interest organization during negotiations about a policy initiative. Concurrently, the interest organization has exerted pressure on other negotiating parties. I want to stress that I am not familiar with the content of the contact (it

¹⁹ Example has been removed.

could be an exchange of facts, arguments, coordination of the handling of the other parties, or something else entirely). However, the continuous contact indicates direct and strategic collaboration between the executives in the ministry and the interest organizations.

Excerpt 17.1. Direct collaboration with interest organizations

A representative from an interest organization appears on *TV2 News*. The permanent secretary points to the screen, saying that the given interest organization has put pressure on some of the other parties during the negotiations. The permanent secretary continues, saying that he has been in constant contact with the representative and in fact has just exchanged text messages with the person in question before their appearance on *TV2 News*.

In the end, the continuous dialogue minimizes problems. Interest organizations have become increasingly professionalized and must be met accordingly:

Handling stakeholders professionally means fewer problems. Because then we know what it is that... for example, if a minister wants something and we have no knowledge of what the stakeholders want. Well, then the minister can end up in the wrong place. So it's part of providing good ministerial counsel and good decision-making – that we know where the stakeholders are and how they act in relation to it. And how they look at the world. It saves us for committee questions and consultations and all sorts of other things (PS 14).

The quote emphasizes how if the interest organizations are not involved in the process, they will find other ways to voice their concerns. This could be through contacts in parliamentary committees that can ask questions on behalf of the interest organizations or even call the minister for a consultation. Thus, involving the interest organizations on a continuous basis can minimize dissatisfaction and/or ensure the dialogue with civil servants, thereby possibly saving the minister from having to become involved in something that creates more work.

CONTINUITY. There is an appreciable variation in the length of minister's employment.²⁰ Thus, interaction between civil servants and interest organizations is important to ensure a through line in the collaboration. Permanent

²⁰ During the last period of government (28 November 2016 – 27 June 2019), there were four different Ministers of Higher Education and Science, three different Ministers of Business of Trade, two different Ministers of Employment, and one Minister of Taxation.

Secretary 2 explains how the collaboration with the interest organizations improves her position to assist the minister:

Ministers are replaced over time. That's just how it is. And sometimes you have to say that having good relationships with each other is useful. And the minister gets that too when they sit here. But lasting relationships – that there's a channel you [the interest organizations, AT] know. And it's not just me – it's also my heads of division and office managers. So we're at different levels. But where you can pick up the phone and say: 'now, you have to listen...' And we can trust each other (PS 2).

Repeated encounters allow the collaboration to develop and enables the establishment of trust:

Then there's the classic give and take. I mean, the reason I know things is also because I inform them. When something is relevant for them (HoD 10).

On top of that, regular contact with interest organizations can ultimately save a ministry for work. As Permanent Secretary 14 explains:

That thing about stakeholders like something we shouldn't spend time on – it's simply misunderstood. We need to know what they're thinking and we need to keep them in the loop on a lot of things. After all, they can usually also handle getting factual information about some processes. Also because if they don't get it, then sometimes things just explode. And that gives us more work (PS 14).

The interest organizations generally tend to handle the information with the necessary discretion, which minimizes the risk that the dialogue escalates and leads to hearings, so-called §20 questions and so forth. This indicates that the contact between interest organizations and opposition politicians can be used as a resource in the dialogue with the minister and ministry. This tit-for-tat, transactional situation seems to ensure that information from the ministry to interest organizations (and vice versa) is generally marked by respect for one's counterpart.

17.2 Collaboration in practice

WHO? THE HIERARCHY SHOWS. The civil servants are in contact with external stakeholders, both interest organizations and actors from the sector. In general, the ministerial hierarchy is reflected in the contact between the civil servants, interest organizations and other external stakeholders: The civil servants are usually in contact with personnel on a corresponding level in the specific organization (their peers, in a sense). Thus, the permanent secretary will be in contact with the highest-ranking person, the head of division is in

contact with the level below the highest-ranking person in the interest organization and so forth. However, one head of division tells of how the contact may also differ, depending on the type of interest organization; more precisely, whether it is an organization with a an elected chairman:

They [the interest organizations, AT] have hierarchies just like we do. Well, because I'm the head of division, I'm mainly talking with the directors. Depending on the case, but also the minister's temperament, I often speak at roughly the same level as the minister. If they're the actual stakeholders. It's less unambiguous (...) where there's a political body. There, I'm probably talking primarily with the director, whereas the minister might speak more with the elected chairman. It isn't an unambiguous boundary (HoD 10).

Concurrently, the distribution of internal spheres of responsibility may also vary. The permanent secretary can choose to delegate various degrees of the regular contact with interest organizations to the division heads, as explained below:

Some. On the one hand, there can sometimes be a kind of division of labour – where I can agree with the permanent secretary, or he can agree with me: 'Won't you take the meeting with that organization?' Then he can take the meeting with the other organization. Sometimes we also attend the same meetings with the organizations. But again, I have them all on my phone, too. Because it's important that I also have a good contact with our stakeholders, that I know them and can call them. Also can call them at strange hours of the day and arrange things (HoD 7).

In general, the interviewees point to the importance of remaining in contact with interest organizations. The empirical material shows that the contact with interest organizations is a collaboration regulated by complex norms, partly mirroring the hierarchical structure of the ministry but also the type of interest organization, the minister's preferences and so forth.

VARIOUS DEGREES OF CONTACT. The civil servants' degree of contact seems to vary, based on three factors: the ministry's remit, the minister's preferences regarding their own contact to external stakeholders, and the special advisor's contact to them. First, some areas have more widespread contact to external stakeholders than others do due to the nature of their remit. Second, the ministers have very different preferences concerning the orchestration of the everyday work; some ministers prefer regular contact with the external stakeholders in general, some prioritize the sector over interest organizations, and vice versa. Consequently, the civil servants' degree of contact might vary. Finally, the minister's special advisor may take this task upon himself, which

subsequently influences the contact between the permanent civil service and the interest organizations.

One permanent secretary tells of a minister who prefers to have the direct contact to the interest organizations. When asked about who is in contact with the interest organizations, Permanent Secretary 16 replies:

It's the Minister. And then I'm the minister's employee. And will also be able to hold meetings with external stakeholders myself – also where I explain what the Minister thinks about something or other. There's no doubt that you meet with different interest groups, depending on who you have as minister (PS 16).

The minister thus takes the lead, and the permanent secretary can serve as stand-in for the minister. Another permanent secretary has a very different experience of the contact with the interest organizations. Here, the minister is less accessible for interest organizations; instead, the contact runs through the special advisor:

I experience that the minister is not available to them [the interest groups, AT]. The minister has chosen to say: I don't want to be some kind of lobbying office. So the minister has outsourced that to his special advisor. And my experience is partly that because the minister has done so – but also because they experience they can't get through with lobbying to me in the classical sense – a lot runs through the special advisor. So she's the one they're trying to sweettalk. (...) I don't feel they contact me nearly as much as they did in the past. It's kind of a gift, but there's also risk associated with it (PS 7).

This is not only due to preferences and the organization of the central administration, but also where the external stakeholders deem they are able to gain the best access. For instance, if external stakeholders find the permanent civil service to be less inclined to listen to their concerns and advance their interests than the special advisor, they might be more inclined to contact the special advisor than the permanent civil service (and vice versa). Likewise, if the minister is known to be responsive to- and engage in dialogue with the external stakeholders, they might be more inclined to reach out to the minister directly. The risk that the permanent secretary mentions is that the special advisor is unable to craft solutions for the interest organizations based on *fachwissen* (see Chapter X on the contact between special advisors and interest organizations for more on this).

MEET AND GREET. When a new minister is appointed, interest organizations want – in some areas *expect* – to meet them and to present their key issues. Thus, meet-and-greet meetings are often arranged, which allow for the interest organizations to meet the minister, present their key issues succinctly, and make the minister aware of their knowledge and expertise. This can entail a

period with frequent meetings. The meetings differ depending on, among other things, what the interest organizations bring to the table: Do they merely want to introduce themselves or do they bring substantial matters to the table? Where the first meeting has the character of a formal conversation, the second type of meeting might require more expertise to engage in the dialogue. Consequently, the role assumed by the permanent secretary in these meetings might differ. Depending on the personality and experience of the minister and permanent secretary, the permanent secretary may participate more or less in the formal conversation. On top of that, the permanent secretary can provide technical or factual knowledge. The minister, who in some instances can be new to the area or have very limited experience with parts of it, might not have sufficient knowledge regarding technical issues or knowledge of the ministry's previous encounters with the interest organizations to be able to engage in qualified dialogue. The permanent secretary can then assist the minister. Participating in meet-and-greet meetings allows the permanent secretary to pose strategic questions to the interest organizations, either to clarify aspects for himself or for the minister. Excerpt 17.2 below illustrates an example of the permanent secretary's participation in a meeting with representatives from an interest organization:

Excerpt 17.2. Provide technical and factual knowledge

There is a meet-and-greet in the minister's office. It involves the minister, permanent secretary and a minister's secretary. The minister is directing the meeting and engages in direct dialogue with the interest organization representatives. At one point, the permanent secretary speaks up, asking if he can just add something 'factual', after which he refers to some figures in the area that the minister discusses with the interest group's representatives. Later, the permanent secretary also asks about a few of the things that the interest organization representatives have mentioned, after which they elaborate.

The permanent secretary helped the minister to navigate the meeting referred to above. One strategy is to write down notes and discreetly direct the minister's attention to them, thus helping the minister with facts, potential questions and the like. Excerpt 17.3 illustrates a situation where the permanent secretary writes down points for the minister, which the minister smoothly incorporates into the conversations shortly thereafter.

Excerpt 17.3. Serving as the minister's memory

There is a meet-and-greet in the minister's office. It involves the minister, the permanent secretary and a minister's secretary. The minister is leading the meeting: after presenting the ministry's representatives, the minister explains why the meeting is taking place and what is going to happen. The interest group presents itself and the points they would like to discuss. During the discussion of the first point, the permanent secretary jots down a few notes in bullet form on his paper. The permanent secretary notes something in block letters in the top corner of the paper. It says 'YOU CAN MENTION ...' followed by two different topics. Shortly thereafter, the minister brings these two issues to the fore. If I had not seen the minister look at the permanent secretary's notes, the manner in which he presented the issues came so naturally that I never would have doubted that the minister himself had thought of it.

The permanent secretaries have a lot on their plate, so I wondered why they did not delegate this task to their top civil servants. Thus, I asked some of the permanent secretaries why they prioritized participation in these kinds of meetings, not least when they know the organization and the representative beforehand. Their participation serves multiple purposes: being the ministry's memory at the meeting (providing *fachwissen* and 'history' from previous encounters) and later being able to jog the minister's memory:

Today, there are many meet-and-greets with interest groups. And you could ask, 'Why am I with them?' It's so that I can be the collective memory. When the minister asks, 'What was it they were saying?' Well, then I have been there (PS 10).

This provides the permanent secretary with knowledge that can come in handy in the future. On top of that, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the permanent secretary is also expected to represent the ministry itself. This provides further opportunity for the permanent secretary to maintain and cultivate their contact with interest organizations, and it provides influence to the permanent secretary and enables the ministry to ensure that the minister is not saying something that is factually wrong or promising something unrealistic.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL CONTACT. The ongoing contact with interest organizations consists of a combination of formal meetings and contact of a more ad hoc nature. The formal contact consists of regular meetings, which can involve the minister, civil servants or both.

So those who are in fact closest to us – there will often be more formal access for them once in a while. Maybe once a year or, for the biggest, once every six months: to come in and deliver some messages to the minister (PS 17).

On top of that, there will usually be continuous contact and collaboration at various organizational levels. Here, Permanent Secretary 17 elaborates on the ongoing collaboration:

But in relation to them, we typically also have some kind of ‘working community’, where we – also on a more operational, practical level – handle some things. And that will, obviously, as a rule, take place down in the organization somewhere. But there’s typically also a link that we take on the strategic management level... I take a meeting with them regularly to just ensure that we’re more or less tuned in to where the challenges lie in the relationship between the ministry and the organization in question on a given theme (PS 17).

This quote also illustrates how the collaboration proceeds on different organizational levels and that the nature of the ongoing dialogue also varies depending on the level. Thus, the more operative and practical issues are handled on the lower levels, where the more strategic coordination involving longer perspectives is handled by the top civil servants. However, other permanent secretaries point to extensive contact to interest organizations; for instance, regarding new policy initiatives:

We actually spend a lot of time on them. And I spend time on them. I can also call them and say: ‘The government is coming with this now. You’re going to have to consider what you’re doing about it. But then you’ve got to know that we know what you’re saying’. So it’s to have that kind of dialogue – close dialogue with them (PS 14).

Several interviewees also stress that the permanent secretaries are expected to participate in the contact with the interest organizations. As Head of Division 14 points out, the permanent secretaries’ collaboration with interest organizations is part of a ministry’s reputation management:

In relation to stakeholder management and stakeholder care, there are also greater expectations for a permanent secretary to show up, represent the ministry, and to be part of the branding that characterizes a modern workplace like ours. So the expectations regarding the visibility of a permanent secretary are also different from those for us [division heads, AT], Where we can be a little more ‘invisible’, working on some other levels, I think (HoD 14).

In comparison, the division heads have contact on a more operational level.

On top of that, the interviewees distinguish between meetings with or without the minister’s presence. While ministers seem to attend meetings with interest organizations to varying degrees, they all seem to be involved in this

contact somehow. Most have meetings – either regular or when needed – with interest organizations. Besides the symbolic value of participation in meetings, the biggest difference is that the meetings where the minister is present are often used to discuss policy on a more general level:

For the minister's meetings – it's more general. What does the government? What is the political project there? (PS 9).

Permanent Secretary 9 points to their role as more withdrawn at the minister's meetings, where the minister takes the lead. Thus, the role of the permanent secretary is to be able to answer questions at the meetings and to know what was discussed to be able to remind the minister, if necessary, on future occasions:

When it comes to the minister's meetings – the minister does most of the talking. I'm there because I need to hear what's going on. Sometimes, of course, I also have to do some of the explaining. But otherwise they are the minister's meetings (PS 9)

17.3 Conclusion

The collaboration with interest organizations is crucial in the Danish political-administrative system. Nevertheless, it seems to be controlled by rather complex and often informal norms. The interest organizations clearly have resources that can have utility for the minister, enabling them to engage in bargaining with the minister and civil servants. The bargaining process can seem hazy to an outsider, among other things due to intermediaries (e.g., when feeding questions to opposition politicians), contact through multiple channels (e.g., contact to administrative officers and the permanent secretary), and in the form of both formal and informal contact (e.g., calls, texts). Still, the collaboration is important to the minister and civil servants.

The interest organizations deliver important input to the ministries by pinpointing potential problems and by assisting with *fachwissen* when developing new policy initiatives. On top of that, they serve as collaborators and sounding boards when new policy is developed, even though they might not change the policy in their direction. There are both more formal meetings including the participation of the permanent secretary as well as informal coordination ad hoc. The permanent secretaries are expected to be involved in the contact with interest organizations, but the degree of their involvement varies, among other things based on the minister's preferences and the area of the ministry in question. The permanent secretary's own personality and network sometimes also come into play.

The collaboration with interest organizations seems to be natural and deeply-rooted in the civil service. The reasons for collaborating with the interest organizations seem to be twofold: First, the interest organizations can deliver input and *fachwissen* that the ministry may not have. Second, and what seems to be most important, the interest organizations can lower the political costs of a political initiative for minister and ministry alike. Thus, they might collaborate with the opposition regarding policy initiatives, provide input for §20-questions, encourage relevant politicians in the Folketing to call the minister into committee for consultations and so forth. Involving interest organizations might prevent them from using their contacts to oppose the minister's initiative. Instead, they might even work to help the initiative along, which was the case when I observed a contact between a permanent secretary and a representative from an interest organization during negotiations parallel to the interest organization asserting pressure on other political parties.

Chapter 18.

Conclusion and contribution

The aim of this dissertation is to investigate how the practices and roles of top civil servants unfold. To examine this question, I have conducted observations of eight permanent secretaries and interviews with 19 permanent secretaries, 15 division heads, and seven ministers. Utilizing a combination of shadowing and interviews, I have explored how politics and administrative logics co-exist in the everyday life of permanent secretaries. I have investigated how permanent secretaries are cohering, connecting and coordinating between the minister (upwards), the ministry (downwards) and the external stakeholders (outwards). Whether permanent secretaries are advisors, interpreters, messengers or opinion-formers depends on the setting. The working life of a permanent secretary is characterized by ‘changeableness’ and all-hours availability. Their loyalty is to their minister and ministry concurrently, which sometimes creates frustration when the one side or the other feels deserted. This leaves them in a kind of ‘Sophie’s choice’ when choosing between minister and ministry.

The main contribution of this dissertation is unique insight into the everyday life of permanent secretaries. Among other things, I present excerpts from the preparatory coordination committee which, to my knowledge, has previously been closed to public scrutiny. Thus, the possibility to obtain access and the presentation of the material is a contribution unto itself. The empirical material provides a nuanced perspective on the practices and roles of permanent secretaries, and it shows how permanent secretaries navigate between multiple practices and many different roles.

In this chapter, I will summarize the overall findings of the dissertation. First, I will summarize five central practices identified in the analysis: cohering, connecting, coordinating, delegating and protecting. Second, I will account for three general roles that permanent secretaries can take: advisor, ministry CEO, and the minister’s right-hand man. Third, I will reflect on the internal and external generalizability of my findings. Finally, I will account for how this dissertation contributes to the existing literature on top bureaucrats before returning to Sir Humphrey Appleby from the British television series *Yes Minister* and Niels Erik Lund from the more recent Danish television series, *Borgen*.

18.1 Practices

COHERING. By ‘cohering’, I mean ensuring that the minister feels like they are a part of the ministry, and, to some degree, views the civil service as an ally. To ensure this, it is important to create a strong connection between permanent secretary and minister, because the permanent secretary represents the civil service. This requires trust and loyalty, but *chemistry* is also required for this relation to work well. The permanent secretaries spend considerable energy becoming acquainted with their ministers and accommodating their needs and wishes. However, the compatibility between their personalities and the chemistry is something the permanent secretary can hardly change if they do not connect with one another. Creating a sense of coherence is important, because a sceptical minister can create a bad atmosphere in the ministry, which trickles all the way down to the lower-ranking civil servants. This also means that the permanent secretary must decode the minister’s more or less explicit expectations to anything and everything to ensure that the civil service adjusts their routines to accommodate the minister’s preferences: Do they work evenings or mornings? Do they prefer very detailed briefs or to save details for appendices? Hence, the permanent secretary has an important task to ensure that the ministry assists the minister and that the minister develops an understanding of the ministry’s resources and possibilities.

CONNECTING. The permanent secretary is the link between minister and ministry. This entails that the permanent secretary must help the minister understand and navigate the material provided by the ministry, but also to translate the minister’s interests and ambitions to the civil service. This can become a complicated balancing act, as it requires the permanent secretary to be constantly and simultaneously orienting upwards and downwards. The permanent secretary must also ensure that the minister’s is permeated throughout the ministry. The permanent secretary therefore has regular meetings with division heads, agency heads, and the board of managers. These (usually weekly) meetings ensure that the permanent secretary is up to date about the goings-on in the ministry. Depending on the organization of the ministry and the delegation, agency heads will have a more or less important role at these meetings.

Being the link between minister and ministry, the permanent secretary is responsible for the quality of the material and counsel that reaches the minister. The system of case handling upwards in the hierarchy is used to ensure the quality of the case material, and the permanent secretary is the final person to assure that a case includes the relevant *fachwissen*, political and administrative aspects (including any possible legal issues).

Another aspect of connecting minister and ministry is to assist and support the minister continuously. Permanent secretaries are usually in close contact with their ministers, assisting them in meetings, through telephone contact or by text. This enables the individual permanent secretary to be entirely familiar with their minister's political vision and to assist them with any questions they may have (even questions of which the minister themselves might not be aware). The permanent secretary can elaborate on details, chains of reasoning and past initiatives within the ministerial remit.

This also entails to welcome the minister's special advisor and linking them to the ministry. The special advisor can also be useful in serving the minister, because they can provide indication of the minister's opinion or position on a given case. Hence, if the permanent secretary cannot get hold of the minister, the special advisor is often easier to reach and usually has a good idea about the minister's perspective on a given case.

COORDINATING. Coordination is a large part of the everyday life of a permanent secretary: coordination with the minister, with the minister's secretariat and with external stakeholders, including other permanent secretaries.

During such coordination, regardless of whether it is with their minister or other civil servants, they are balancing the roles as the *fachwissen* specialist within the ministerial remit and as the minister's advisor and representative. This requires *fachwissen*, *dienstwissen*, political craft and knowledge of their minister's position on a given issue. However, another crucial skill is their social skills, including their ability to network. Social skills are important to establish a relationship with the minister during negotiations, when coordinating with other ministries, and when they are establishing and maintaining relations with representatives from interest organizations.

Permanent secretaries must find out what different actors think, which entails an awareness of their actions and statements, but also what is left out. Politics is a tit-for-tat game, so the incremental learnings from earlier interactions are important; for instance, when assisting the minister in finding political compromises that will not create stakeholder outcry. *Dienstwissen*, *fachwissen* and political craft are therefore essential skills. Permanent secretaries must also know how to 'play the game' (i.e., how to utilize these skills). The link seems to be their social skills, including *fingerspitzengefühl* and their network. In short, it is not enough to hold all the cards (i.e., *fachwissen*, *dienstwissen* and political craft); you also need to know how to play your cards right (i.e., through social skills).

A continuous collaboration and coordination with interest organizations is important, because interest organizations may provide valuable infor-

mation that can save time and energy, thereby lowering the costs of policy initiatives. Another reason to collaborate with interest organizations is to keep them on your side; if interest organizations are not satisfied with ministry initiatives, they might encourage opposition members to ask Folketing questions or to call the minister to a committee meeting. This can devour a ministry's time and resources and put the minister on the spot if sector interests are not involved.

DELEGATING. Permanent secretaries do not have the time to attend to everything for which they are responsible. Being the minister's right-hand man and ministry CEO is tantamount to having multiple full-time jobs. And if the minister has a permanent seat in one or more government committees, the permanent secretary can add another job to their list. Having a minister in a government committee therefore often entails that the permanent secretaries feel a need to delegate some of their work to one or more division heads. So – what do they delegate? Many permanent secretaries delegate part or most of their work as administrative head to a head of division. Some permanent secretaries insisted on spending time on their organization and chose to delegate other tasks to division heads, such as the regular meetings with political spokespersons or even negotiations with other actors.

If something gets out of control in the media, however, if there are tricky negotiations, or if political spokespeople 'act up', the permanent secretary makes time to assist their minister. I have not encountered any situations in which a permanent secretary ever asked a minister to postpone their needs due to tasks related to ministry management. The permanent secretary would rather reschedule job interviews or postpone a meeting with a head of unit and administrative officers who are already seated at the meeting table. The permanent secretary's calendar also depends on the minister's needs (and calendar). Hence, if the minister's schedule changes, the permanent secretary might have to reschedule her day as well. When that happens, work related to ministry management is postponed because of its non-urgent nature. The degree of delegation varies across ministries and if problems arise that force the permanent secretary to adjust their focus. For instance, substantial problems in the agencies might shift the permanent secretary's focus to the agencies, because they could potentially hurt the minister and the ministry's image.

PROTECTING. The permanent secretaries are also working to protect the ministry and minister from criticism. Among other things, this includes minimizing and handling errors in the organization, anticipating potential pitfalls and ensuring that the basis for making decisions is the best possible. This dual role sometimes collides, however, forcing the permanent secretary to 'pick a

side'. My empirical material does not include enough material on this to make unequivocal conclusions on when they choose the minister and when they choose the ministry. Nevertheless, my empirical material contains examples of permanent secretaries standing up to a minister who wanted to dismiss civil servants who realized there had been a mistake. In many instances, however, there is a large overlap between protecting minister and ministry. For instance, the permanent secretaries are involved in coordination with interest organizations to prevent and protect the ministry and minister from (unnecessary) parliamentary hearings, parliamentary questions etc. that the interest organizations can initiate. Furthermore, there is a continuous exchange of information from both sides to ensure a mutual relationship, where the permanent secretaries are able to initiate a response to criticism, which the interest organization can use in the public debate.

Protecting the ministry's reputation and skills is an ongoing task for permanent secretaries. This entails ensuring that the ministry provides a nuanced presentation of the pros and cons of the minister's initiatives when writing covers. They must be loyal towards the professional, technical knowledge within the ministerial remit, and to be open about the resources: What is possible within the given time with the given resources? And what is given less priority and attention if we choose this solution? This is a way to protect the ministry from criticism from political spokespersons or in negotiations.

18.2 Roles

The following section summarizes my findings of permanent secretaries' roles. It provides a summary of three general roles, albeit not an exhaustive list. Even though there are several similarities between how permanent secretaries perform their job, there are also differences, which is typically due to differences in the ministers' skillsets, demands and personalities, as well as being due to differences in the skillsets and personalities of the permanent secretaries. Some of the common features of the role deserve to be enhanced, which I will do in the following.

BEING THE MINISTER'S RIGHT-HAND MAN. Similar to how chameleons adapt their colours to their surroundings, permanent secretaries must continuously adjust their behaviour and support to the minister depending on the context. If the minister needs assistance to answer questions, the permanent secretary should be ready to jump in and actively assist the minister. If the minister needs legitimacy, the permanent secretary can nod and show their endorsement of what the minister is saying. If the minister needs a promoter,

the permanent secretary should step in with arguments supporting the minister's idea. If the minister is in a meeting, the permanent secretary can serve as the minister's memory, either asking questions themselves or passing notes to the minister. When the minister simply needs an extra set of eyes and ears, the permanent secretary mainly takes notes. These are just a few examples of how the role as the minister's right-hand man has many facets for the permanent secretary, depending on the context.

This also means that the permanent secretary is basically available at all hours and that their everyday life can be rather unstable: if the minister requests their presence, they will usually be there. This role usually consumes much more time in the beginning of the minister's appointment, when they need more help. This is especially true for ministers with limited experience as manager, MP and/or minister. However, even an experienced minister can find it very demanding to be appointed to a new ministerial remit.

Division heads also emphasized this role as one of the main differences between their work and that of the permanent secretary. The variety of tasks requires a broad range of skills of the permanent secretary: *fachwissen*, *dienstwissen*, political craft and social skills.

In general, the role as the minister's right hand man demands the majority of the permanent secretary's time. This is also true because the permanent secretary must be the minister's right-hand man or stand-in when the minister is absent. During internal meetings with division heads and agency heads, for example, the permanent secretary was very aware about ensuring that they were working for the minister, hence pointing to the minister's position on different issues and asking whether the minister had approved the various things.

ADVISOR. The permanent secretaries are advisors for their ministers and are expected to provide political-tactical counsel and advice on communication, *fachwissen* and *dienstwissen*. Besides the ministerial advisor, the permanent secretary is the closest sounding board for the minister. When providing counsel, permanent secretaries must balance considerations about the professional, technical and political-tactical aspects, as well as the future process, which requires certain skills: *fachwissen*, *dienstwissen* and political craft.

Permanent secretaries are important advisors because they possess a unique library of knowledge. First, they are reading the majority of the written material produced in the ministry and continually in contact with the division heads. Thus, the permanent secretary knows what is happening across the different divisions throughout the ministry. Second, the permanent secretary spends considerable time with the minister, assisting them at meetings and having one-on-one talks. This provides the permanent secretary with insight

into the minister's line of reasoning and knowledge of the minister's position on a broad range of issues. Finally, meetings with the other permanent secretaries, both breakfast and lunch meetings but also meetings in preparatory government committee meetings, also provide the permanent secretary with unique knowledge about what is going on in other ministries and the government policy more generally. All of this leaves the permanent secretary with a unique combination of information that can be very useful for the minister. Thus, while the division heads can assist within their remit, they do not have the same overview as the permanent secretary.

The permanent secretaries need to have sufficient *fachwissen* within their ministerial remit to be able to advise and assist the minister when serving as the minister's right-hand man in meetings. However, they do not need to know every detail of a case – there are other civil servants for that. Instead, the permanent secretaries need to know the process and what tools are available for the minister to realize their policy. This entails providing advice about when to propose a bill in the Folketing to reach a deadline, who they should invite to negotiations, and what should be put forward at meetings, as well as advising on political-tactical issues to guarantee support for the minister's policy both within the government and in the Folketing. In contrast, the special advisor is usually expected to provide party-political advice. On top of that, the special advisor can also provide political-tactical advice, or maybe even counselling on *fachwissen*.

MINISTRY CEO. Another important role is as CEO of the ministry. In the end, the permanent secretary is responsible for the ministry delivering well-written, well-argued briefs to the minister, and for implementing policy initiatives. This entails everything from ensuring the best possible organization with the right employees and a good culture, to ensuring that the minister's initiatives are actually implemented and that the written material is thoroughly prepared. Depending on the size of the ministry and whether it has the entire value chain (i.e., from initiative to implementation of the initiatives in practice), the extent of this part of the job can vary.

Being ministry CEO also includes ensuring that the ministry is prepared to serve the current and coming ministers. The organization should be optimized to handle current challenges and needs, but also ready to handle problems that might occur in the future. Hence, this role includes initiating development initiatives within the ministry, both regarding the initiation of the education and training of individual civil servants, preparing initiatives that develop the organization, and solutions to specific issues that could potentially become challenges in the future.

The permanent secretaries generally stress the importance of a well-working ministry. For instance, many of them emphasize that it is not enough to realize their policy proposal in the Folketing if the policy is not implemented. However, the permanent secretaries argue that they need to ensure that this happens in practice, because ministers often focus less on the implementation phase.

Being CEO of the ministry is potentially very time-consuming. However, when the permanent secretaries must prioritize between their roles, this one is usually given the lowest priority. In other words, if the minister needs the permanent secretary for a meeting, this will trump a task related to the daily ministry management. The exception to this is when there are problems in the agencies. Hence, if there are problems within one or more agencies, the permanent secretary will have to spend time on them, because they can hurt the minister and the ministry's reputation.

18.3 Generalizability

In this section, I will address the generalizability of my results. I will discuss whether the results can be generalized within the Danish central administration (internal generalizability) and the degree to which it can be generalized to other contexts; more specifically at the local level in the Danish case and at the national level in other parliamentary democracies (external generalizability).

INTERNAL GENERALIZABILITY. I believe that the internal generalizability of my findings is quite high. I interviewed permanent secretaries from most of the Danish ministries, and even though there are differences between the work carried out by different permanent secretaries, ministry management, assisting the minister and protecting the ministry seem to be similar across ministries. In several ministries, civil servants told me that their ministry was distinct from most other ministries, and I could therefore have focused on how differences in the minister's personality, permanent secretaries' personality, and their management style might affect the everyday life within the ministry. Similarly, Noordegraaf (2000, p. 331) finds that top civil servants '... play this role differently, as they work under different ministers and as they have different mental maps' (p. 331). In other words, the role is different because their personalities differ, the ministerial remit differs, the combination of minister and top civil servants differs etc. During my fieldwork and interviews, however, I still encountered many similarities in their practices and roles despite the differences in personality, experience and ministerial remit. For instance, they need to:

- Establish a fruitful, trusting relation to the minister
- Provide counsel to the minister
- Prepare written material for the minister
- Navigate an endless stream of information
- Engage with the special advisor
- Participate in preparatory government committees
- Manage the ministry
- Help the minister/ministry respond to media stories

Top civil servants might therefore perform different versions of the role, but there are some inherent tasks in the role that they must all address. Furthermore, the relative weight of the different tasks might vary across ministerial remits, based on the minister's preferences, the size of the ministry, the current salience of themes within the ministerial remit, the minister's membership of government committees and so on. Despite of all of these potential matters that influence how the role is conducted, there also seem to be many similarities. This is also the case if we compare my findings to previous findings from the Danish context. In the late 1990s, Lotte Jensen studied permanent secretaries in Denmark (2001). There are several parts of permanent secretaries' job that she describes in a similar manner. For instance, Jensen's interviewees also underline the importance of *dienstwissen* (i.e., knowledge of 'the game'). This is argued to be one of the reasons why few 'outsiders' are appointed to the permanent secretary position (Trangbæk, 2021). My empirical material shows similar tendencies, where the importance of familiarity with the organization, practices and norms renders it difficult for outsiders to enter and serve as permanent secretary. Similarly, the interviewees in Jensen (2001) also emphasize the importance of being able to find a majority and providing strategic advice. Hence, the need for political craft seems to have been important then as now. However, it also illustrates that some things have changed. For instance, Jensen underlines the importance of providing advice to the minister because there were no special advisors (2001, pp. 86-87), and one-third of the permanent secretaries reported that they provide advice on the minister's own party, whereas my empirical material shows that advice on the minister's party is a task left to the special advisor. Thus, the introduction of special advisors does seem to have affected the role of the Danish permanent secretary.

EXTERNAL GENERALIZABILITY: PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACIES.

There are certain aspects of the Danish context that must be highlighted regarding generalizability. Denmark is a parliamentary democracy, the ministers carry an individual responsibility within their ministerial remit, and the number of politically appointed civil servants (special advisors) is relatively limited. While I expect these conditions to affect how well my findings travel to other countries, I nevertheless do see similarities when comparing my findings to the existing literature on top civil servants from countries with similar institutional rules. For instance, when comparing my findings with Noordegraaf's observational study on the work patterns of directors general (position corresponding to the permanent secretary in Denmark) and directors in the Netherlands, there seem to be many similarities regarding their overall practices:

Public policy managers work long hours, including evenings and weekend. During these hours, they have many meetings and deal with a wide variety of papers. They attend scheduled meetings, have unscheduled encounters, and do desk-work. They channel a continuous stream of written and spoken texts through these episodes. Policy managers contact people, welcome visitors, sign papers, attend conferences, prepare political debates, watch meetings in Parliament, and organize site visits. They advise ministers, discuss newspaper articles, think of plans, introduce new words, and present formal standpoints (Noordegraaf, 2007, p. 78).

Hence, the overall practices seem to be similar across countries. While there might be differences in the specific practices (e.g., the turning-head practice at meetings), I argue that my observations on roles and practices can transfer to, for instance, the Dutch context. The findings will always have to be modified to the specific context and, as pointed out earlier, there will always be differences regarding management style, chemistry with the minister etc.

If the context varies too much on the parameters presented above, however, I do not consider my findings on roles and practices to apply. For instance, the highest ranking civil servants in France, the *directeurs d'administration centrale*, are politically appointed (although usually part of the civil service beforehand) and must navigate between expectations from different actors: the minister, other members of the minister's cabinet and other civil servants within the department (Elgie, 2001). On top of that, there are also politically appointed *directeurs de cabinet* and special advisors (i.e., many more politically appointed civil servants). Hence, the practices and roles must be assumed to vary significantly from my observations in the Danish context.

EXTERNAL GENERALIZABILITY: LOCAL LEVEL. This section concerns the generalizability to the local context; more precisely, the chief executive in Danish municipalities. I argue that my findings can only be generalized to the local level to a limited degree (e.g., to municipal chief executives, which are the highest ranking civil servants in Danish municipalities). The mayor is the administrative head of the civil service, which is hierarchically organized similar to the ministries.²¹ The mayor is therefore accountable for everything that goes on in the civil service; hence, she can also intervene in everything that is going on (Blom-Hansen & Bækgaard, 2014). In reality, the responsibility of the administration on the municipal level is usually delegated to the municipal chief executive, which is rather similar to what happens in the ministries. Thus, there are similarities between permanent secretary and the municipal chief executive; for instance, the municipal chief executive will also have to orient themselves upwards, downwards and outwards. They are expected to translate information from the civil servants to the mayor and city council and to process large amounts of information, similar to the permanent secretary. While there is limited knowledge about the exact practices of municipal chief executives (Blom-Hansen & Bækgaard, 2014, p. 115), there are at least four circumstances that I expect will lead to other practices and roles than those observed in the ministries. First, the mayor is usually the only full-time employed politician. The remaining city council members are part-time politicians with a civilian job on the side. On top of that, there is no clear opposition in the municipalities. Instead, the politicians work in various committees, and the seats are usually distributed between all of the political parties; not just to the majority. These committees set the direction for the policy within the given remit. This is very different from the work going on in parliament, where there are at least 179 full-time politicians²² and an opposition that must constantly be involved in negotiations without being accountable for the process. I therefore expect this to affect the work practices of the civil service in municipalities significantly. Second, in most Danish municipalities, the municipal chief executive does not have any colleagues within the municipality with whom they must coordinate, whereas permanent secretaries must coordinate with permanent secretaries in other ministries. This alters the leeway for top civil servants on the municipal level compared to the central administration. Third, the turn-over among mayors during the four-year election period is generally much less than is the case with the ministers in national government. This is important in light of the significant amount of time required to adjust processes

²¹ The exception being a few Danish municipalities with *magistratstyre*, which I will not go into here.

²² There can be more, because ministers can be appointed without being an MP.

and materials to a new politician. Hence, the permanent secretaries spend more time adjusting their processes to a new minister. Finally, there is more media attention on national-level issues. Hence, under normal circumstances I would expect permanent secretaries to be more involved in handling the media than their counterparts in the municipalities.

18.4 Contributions

In this part of the chapter, I will discuss how my findings relate and contribute to some of the existing debates and theories. First, I will examine the use of agency theory and stewardship theory when analysing top civil servants. I argue that the role of permanent secretaries seems more to resemble a steward than an agent. Hence, my analysis is more in line with the description in stewardship theory of the permanent secretary–minister relation. Second, I will turn to the debate and concept of functional politicization. Similar to previous findings in the Danish context, I also find that functional politicization is occurring. However, I suggest the drawing of a distinction between two subtypes of functional politicization: *uncritical functional politicizations* and *reflexive functional politicizations*. Finally, I turn to the relationships between the permanent civil servants and the special advisors. Here, I argue that the civil servants might also be able to affect the counsel provided by the special advisors to the minister. In other words, it is a two-way relationship, where the special advisor serves more as a sounding board and an advisor on party-political issues than as a mediator between civil service and minister.

Contribution: A continuously evolving role division and public service bargain?

In the theory section, I presented different perspectives on the division of roles between civil servants and politicians. The question becomes: What have we learned from my analysis on permanent secretaries? First, the role division seems to vary over time. The specific role division depends primarily on the minister's ideas about the role division. After all, the minister is both the political and administrative head of the ministry. Hence, if the minister wants to be more involved in managing the ministry, they will be. Conversely, they can also leave most of that role to the permanent secretary if they prefer doing so. Second, as pointed out in Chapters 6 and 11, the permanent secretary–minister relationship usually evolves over the course of the minister's term in office. In other words, as the minister grows more experienced, the permanent secretary is possibly able to focus less on assisting the minister. For instance, I encountered ministers who wanted support and feedback on their appearance in

the Folketing. The permanent secretary, therefore, watches the minister's appearances in the Folketing (usually from home, allowing the permanent secretary to multitask). As the example illustrates, the role of the permanent secretary greatly depends on how experienced a new minister is when they are appointed. My analysis has revealed how a minister with little experience as either manager, MP or minister requires more assistance and support in the beginning to compensate for their lack of experience, but that the minister inevitably become more independent over time. This independence also comes as the minister's knowledge and experience with their ministerial remit develops. Therefore, when discussing the division of roles, we might need to consider it as a dynamic phenomenon that is constantly in flux.

This could also mean that the invisible contract (i.e., the Public Service Bargain), between minister and top civil servants is constantly renegotiated and in transformation. While these changes are likely incremental, based on my empirical findings, the evolving relation, development of skills and deepening of trust constantly alters the relationships between them. Hence, the rewards, competencies and loyalty might change. The Public Service Bargain could also be altered when a new permanent secretary or minister is appointed, as their relation seems to be so dependent on the chemistry between them. Hence, the permanent secretary's degree of autonomy and loyalty towards the minister could depend on their chemistry. Thus, an implication of my findings is that we should consider if the role division between minister and top civil servant (and the Public Service Bargain) possibly evolves over time.

Contribution: Subgroups of functional politicization

As I accounted for in the theoretical chapter, there is debate in the literature about politicization, where previous studies have found evidence of functional politicization in Denmark (J. G. Christensen et al., 2014, p. 217; de Visscher & Salomonsen, 2013, p. 78; L. Jensen, 2011, p. 236). In my empirical material, the permanent secretaries make no secret of the fact that they anticipate the minister's opinion, their position on policy issues and so on and so forth in their daily work. The permanent secretaries actually go so far as to argue that *fachwissen* is essential, but the material is also presented with a political *fingerspitzegefühl* (i.e., political-tactical element) in mind: Is this something that the minister could potentially support? And would it be realistic to administer? Arguably, developing initiatives without integrating politically relevant aspects would be a waste of time.

In line with previous studies, I find that the permanent secretaries are functionally politicized and that permanent secretaries anticipate and integrate politically relevant aspects in their daily tasks (cf. Hustedt & Salomonsen, 2014, p. 750). I want to emphasize that the literature considers functional politicization to be legitimate as long as civil servants do not provide pure partisan advice, and can still provide free, frank and fearless advice. However, during the collection of the empirical material I became aware of a distinction in relation to functional politicization, which is not included in the current concept compared to Shaw and Eichbaum's (2020a, p. 853) notion that a more nuanced concept could be useful. Top civil servants can either 1) uncritically anticipate and integrate their minister's opinion and other politically relevant aspects or 2) anticipate and integrate their minister's opinion and other politically relevant aspects, but also present alternative solutions and highlight the consequences of a given policy. In my empirical material, the top civil servants argue that the first type of advice can end up being a disservice to the politician, even though it might be the path of least resistance, because the minister is unaware of the consequences of the policy initiative. The interviewees argue that while the second type of advice might be more demanding in terms of preparation and may lead to the same result in the end, the minister will make a more well-informed choice, which is valuable unto itself. Hence, in continuation of my findings, I suggest distinguishing between two subtypes of functional politicization:

'Uncritical functional politicization' could be defined as: 'The civil servants *uncritically* anticipating and integrating politically relevant aspects in their daily work.'

'Reflexive functional politicization' could be defined as: 'The civil servants anticipate and integrate politically relevant aspects in their daily work *but also* provide alternative solutions and/or flesh out consequences (pros and cons) and/or challenge the minister's position on the matter.'

None of the types restrict civil servants in their provision of free, frank and fearless counsel. However, the 'reflexive functional politicization' provides more information to the minister regarding their choice and will include alternatives to the anticipated 'first choice' of the minister.

Contribution: Agency or stewardship?

As I accounted for in the theoretical chapter, agency theory is often the starting point when scholars try to explain and discuss the behaviour of top civil servants. Another way to study their role could be through stewardship theory, where the subordinate strives to be a good steward to the principal; that is,

make decisions in the principal's best interest. My empirical material suggests that top civil servants generally act more as stewards than agents, but this also varies depending on whether viewed from the perspective of principal or agent (i.e., from the perspective of the minister or the permanent secretary).

SUBORDINATE: AGENT OR STEWARD? Contrary to the minister's point of view, the civil servants generally argued that one of their main objectives is the success of their minister and to make a difference. If top civil servants act as the rational 'economic man' from agency theory, I would expect to observe them seeking the path of least resistance to increase slack, furthering the 'easy' solution and potentially trying to deceive the minister to get their own way. However, this was not my experience. They spend many hours in meetings with lower-ranking civil servants to ensure that the case was prepared not only with the right arguments, but also in a manner that suited the minister. They were available to assist the minister at (almost) all hours, and the minister's preferred working habits prescribe the permanent secretary's day of work.

The main claim of stewardship theory is that the steward strives to serve the principal in the best possible way. In general, my observations left me convinced that the reality is closer to the permanent secretary acting as steward than agent. This raises two questions. First, did I observe 'the real thing'? I am aware that I was only present for a fraction of the time they serve as top civil servants, they chose the dates, they decided what meetings I could attend and so forth. As I argued in the method chapter, however, I still believe I spent a sufficient amount of time not merely observing a polished version of their working life. Second, one might wonder whether I found the permanent secretaries' preferences to be consistent with the ministers' preferences because *ex ante* mechanisms keep them in check. I cannot know for sure. When discussing their motivation with the permanent secretaries, however, they mentioned things like serving the public good or the specific ministerial remit, which seems consistent with stewardship theory.

PRINCIPAL. The ministers' opinions about the role played by their permanent secretaries vary. Some ministers argue that the permanent secretary did not always work to promote the minister's agenda. Instead, they tell of experiences where they believed the permanent secretary did not work to ensure the minister's interest. Hence, some ministers argue that the permanent secretaries sometimes had their own interests in mind. This understanding resembles the agency perspective. Other ministers argue that they found the permanent secretary to work loyally for the minister-defined interest, as long as the minister

clearly expresses their agenda. These ministers did not argue that the permanent secretary's interests differed from their own – quite the contrary. Hence, this is more in line with stewardship theory.

Some of the ways to ensure the agent's preferences that are aligned with the interest of the principal came up during the collection of empirical material; especially the possibility to replace the permanent secretary. Several interviewees mentioned the minister's opportunity to replace the permanent secretary should the former be unsatisfied with the latter, which point to an ex ante control mechanism. It is difficult to assert the degree to which this happens in practice, because we rarely know the real reason behind the dismissal of permanent secretaries and there is also indication that they remain in their position for less time than was previously the case because of the work pressure. However, if the minister has the permanent secretary dismissed in order to choose a permanent secretary with more converging interests, this line of thought resembles the ally principle from agency theory. If this initiative is used as an ex ante control mechanism to ensure an alignment of interests, it indicates that they (implicitly) think along the lines of agency theory. As mentioned earlier, the minister's position was divided when discussing the behaviour of the permanent secretaries. Some used a language that fits with the description of agents in agency theory, whereas the description of the other half better resembles the description of a steward. However, during my fieldwork and the interviews with civil servants, I mainly encountered indications of stewardship. In general, the empirical material indicates that the permanent secretary's relationship to the minister resembles to a greater degree the description of a stewardship relation than an agency relation.

Contribution: The relationship to special advisors as a two-way street

The empirical material also illustrates some interesting dynamics between permanent secretary and special advisor. The analysis suggests that the relation between top civil servants and special advisors can be considered a two-way street. I found that the permanent secretaries use the special advisor as a sounding board to get indications concerning the minister's position on different issues. However, the special advisor also uses the permanent civil service to obtain information and for sparring. Further along these lines, some interviewees even mention that the special advisor can be used strategically: one give information on to the special advisor that they might pass on to the minister. This can be useful if the minister is a bit sceptical towards the civil service and therefore potentially more prone to listen to their special advisor. Hence, the civil service might also qualify the counsel provided by the special

advisor; that is, that the civil service affects the special advisor's advice to the minister.

When I compare my results to the current literature on special advisors, I find that they diverge from some of the existing studies on the special advisor role. The literature on administrative politicization suggests that the special advisor can affect the advice provided by the permanent civil service by either constraining the access or by 'colouring' the advice (Eichbaum & Shaw, 2008, pp. 342-344; Shaw & Eichbaum, 2020b). My empirical material did not find indication of the administrative politicization, which is in line with some studies (Öhberg et al., 2016). I draw this conclusion because even though some special advisors read the written material from the civil service, it is not their call whether the material is ready for the minister; that decision is made by the permanent secretary. The permanent secretary and civil service might well ask the special advisor about the minister's position on a given issue, and the advisor's answer could influence their advice (functional politicization). Hence, the special advisor can offer their opinion to the civil service, but they do not have any final say in what is presented for the minister. Thus, the special advisor serves more as a sounding board and as an advisor on party-political issues than as a mediator between civil service and minister.

This is another way of thinking about the relationship between the permanent civil service and special advisors. In this perspective, they both provide something to the other part that qualifies their counsel: The special advisor qualifies the counsel provided by the permanent civil service by helping them to understand what the minister wants. On the other hand, the permanent civil service qualifies the counsel provided by the special advisor by providing material and assisting with questions regarding the professional and technical content of a given issue. The role of the special advisor is only a minor part of my empirical material, and establishing the extent of this two-way relationship deserves further research.

18.5 A final point on Sir Humphrey and Niels

I began this dissertation with two descriptions of permanent secretaries. Sir Humphrey from the British TV series 'Yes Minister' as the sly civil servant who gives the minister the impression that the minister is in charge, when in reality, Sir Humphrey is pulling the strings behind the minister's back. The second example is Niels from the Danish TV series 'Borgen' who seems timid and not as a man who gets things done. He is not the type that makes decisions behind the minister's back, and often, he just hangs around in the minister's office without a specific errand.

I did not encounter either a 'Sir Humphrey' or 'Niels' in the field. Sir Humphrey is best described as an agent out of control that is trying to take care of his own interests. However, as I argued above, the permanent secretaries come closer to the description of a steward than an agent. I also found permanent secretaries to be much more involved in things than Niels. First, they do not just hang around the minister's office; they provide advice and would be replaced if they were not able to assist the minister. Hence, the real world's top civil servants play a more significant role than Niels but a less dominating role than Sir Humphrey. However, both TV series are right in the sense that permanent secretaries prefer to stay in the shadows and leave the lime-light to the minister.

References

- Aberbach, J. D., Putnam, R. D., & Rockman, B. A. (1981). *Bureaucrats and politicians in western democracies*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press.
- Aberbach, J. D., & Rockman, B. A. (1988). Image IV Revisited: Executive and Political Roles. *Governance*, 1(1), 1-25. doi:10.1111/j.1468-0491.1988.tb00057.x
- Aberbach, J. D., & Rockman, B. A. (2006). The Past and Future of Political-Administrative Relations: Research from Bureaucrats and Politicians to In the Web of Politics – and Beyond. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 29(12), 977. doi:10.1080/01900690600854589
- Alford, J., Hartley, J., Yates, S., & Hughes, O. (2017). Into the Purple Zone: Deconstructing the Politics/Administration Distinction. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 47(7), 752-763. doi:10.1177/0275074016638481
- Bach, T., & Veit, S. (2018). The Determinants of Promotion to High Public Office in Germany: Partisan Loyalty, Political Craft, or Managerial Competencies? *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 28(2), 254. doi:10.1093/jopart/mux041
- Bach, T., & Wegrich, K. (2020). Politicians and bureaucrats in executive government. In R. B. Andeweg, R. Elgie, L. Helms, J. Kaarbo, & F. Müller-Rommel (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Executives* (First edition ed., pp. 525-546). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Barnard, C. I. ([1938] 1971). *The Functions of the Executive* (30. ed., Anniversary ed., pp. 384).
- Bartkowiak-Theron, I., & Robyn Sappey, J. (2012). The methodological identity of shadowing in social science research. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 12(1), 7-16. doi:10.1108/14439881211222697
- Berg, B. L. (2009). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (7. ed. ed.). Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Berry, J. M. (2002). Validity and Reliability Issues In Elite Interviewing. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 35(4), 679-682. doi:10.1017/S1049096502001166
- Bevir, M. (2011). Public Administration as storytelling. *Public Administration*, 89(1), 183-195. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9299.2011.01908.x
- Blaikie, N. W. H. (2010). *Designing social research: the logic of anticipation* (2. ed. ed.). Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Blom-Hansen, J., & Bækgaard, M. (2014). Forvaltning i kommuner og regioner. In J. Blom-Hansen, P. M. Christiansen, T. Pallesen, & S. Serritzlew (Eds.), *Offentlig forvaltning – et politologisk perspektiv* (1 ed., pp. 108-132): Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- Blom-Hansen, J., & Christiansen, P. M. (2021). Den demokratiske styringskæde. In J. Blom-Hansen & P. M. Christiansen (Eds.), *Det demokratiske system* (pp. 11-36): Hans Reitzels-Forlag.

- Bourgault, J. (2011). Canada's Senior Public Service and the Typology of Bargains: from the Hierarchy of Senior Civil Servants to A Community of "Controlled" Entrepreneurs. *Public Policy and Administration*, 26(2), 253-275. doi:10.1177/0952076710391517
- Bourgault, J., & Van Dorpe, K. (2013). Managerial reforms, Public Service Bargains and top civil servant identity. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 79(1), 49-70. doi:10.1177/0020852312467739
- Carpenter, D., & Krause, G. A. (2015). Transactional Authority and Bureaucratic Politics. *J-PART*, 25(1), 5-25. doi:10.1093/jopart/muu012
- Cecchini, M. (2018). *The Healthy Child and the Child at Risk: The Formation and Transformation of Health, Risk and Non-risk Identities in the Encounter between Policy, Teachers and Pupils*: Politica.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing Grounded Theory* (2. ed. ed.). London: SAGE Publications.
- Christensen, J. G. (2004). Political responsiveness in a merit bureaucracy. In B. G. Peters & J. Pierre (Eds.), *Politicization of the civil service in comparative perspective: the quest for control* (pp. 14-40). London: Routledge.
- Christensen, J. G. (2006). Ministers and Mandarins under Danish Parliamentarism. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 29(12), 997-1019. doi:10.1080/01900690600854621
- Christensen, J. G. (2021). Det administrative system. In J. Blom-Hansen & P. M. Christiansen (Eds.), *Det demokratiske system* (pp. 157-192): Hans Reitzels-Forlag.
- Christensen, J. G., Klemmensen, R., & Opstrup, N. (2014). Politicization and the Replacement of Top Civil Servants in Denmark. *Governance*, 27(2), 215-241. doi:10.1111/gove.12036
- Christensen, J. G., & Mortensen, P. B. (2021). Regeringsarbejdet: Mellem ressortautonomi og central samordning. In J. Blom-Hansen & P. M. Christiansen (Eds.), *Det demokratiske system* (5 ed., pp. 127-156): Hans Reitzels-Forlag.
- Christensen, J. P. (1997). *Ministeransvar*. København: Jurist- og Økonomforbundets Forlag.
- Christiansen, P. M., & Salomonsen, H. H. (2018). Denmark – Loyalty and the public advisor bargain. In C. Eichbaum & R. Shaw (Eds.), *Ministers, Minders and Mandarins. An international Study of Relationships at the Executive Summit of Parliamentary Democracies*. (pp. 53-71). Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.
- Connaughton, B. (2017). Political-administrative relations: The role of political advisers. *Administration*, 65(2), 165-182. doi:10.1515/admin-2017-0020
- Czarniawska, B. (2007). *Shadowing and other techniques for doing fieldwork in modern societies*. Malmø: Liber.
- Czarniawska, B. (2014). Why I think shadowing is the best field technique in management and organization studies. *Qualitative Research in Organizations*

- and Management: An International Journal*, 9(1), 90-93. doi:10.1108/QROM-02-2014-1198
- Czarniawska, B. (2018). Fieldwork Techniques for Our Times: Shadowing. In M. Ciesielska & D. Jemielniak (Eds.), *Qualitative Methodologies in Organization Studies: Volume II: Methods and Possibilities* (Vol. II, pp. 53-74). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dahlström, C., & Niklasson, B. (2013). The Politics of Politicization in Sweden. *Public Administration*, 91(4), 891-907. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9299.2012.02113.x
- Davis, J. H., Schoorman, F. D., & Donaldson, L. (1997a). Davis, Schoorman, and Donaldson Reply: The Distinctiveness of Agency Theory and Stewardship Theory. *The Academy of Management review*, 22(3), 611-613.
- Davis, J. H., Schoorman, F. D., & Donaldson, L. (1997b). Toward a stewardship theory of management. *The Academy of Management review*, 22(1), 20-47. doi:10.5465/AMR.1997.9707180258
- de Visscher, C., & Salomonsen, H. H. (2013). Explaining differences in ministerial ménages à trois: multiple bargains in Belgium and Denmark. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 79(1), 71-90. doi:10.1177/0020852312467615
- Denhardt, R. B. (1999). The Future of Public Administration. *Public Administration & Management*, 4(2), 279-292.
- Derlien, H.-U. (2003). Mandarins or Managers? The Bureaucratic Elite in Bonn, 1970 to 1987 and Beyond. *Governance*, 16(3), 401-428. doi:10.1111/1468-0491.00222
- Dey, I. (2001 [1999]). *Grounding grounded theory: guidelines for qualitative inquiry* (Eks. 2: 3.printing, 2001. ed.). San Diego: Academic Press.
- Dicke, L. A. (2002). Ensuring Accountability in Human Services Contracting: Can Stewardship Theory Fill the Bill? *American Review of Public Administration*, 32(4), 455-470. doi:10.1177/027507402237870
- Dicke, L. A., & Ott, J. S. (2002). A test: Can Stewardship Theory serve as a second conceptual foundation for accountability methods in contracted human services? *International Journal of Public Administration*, 25(4), 463-487. doi:10.1081/PAD-120013252
- Donaldson, L., & Davis, J. H. (1991). Stewardship Theory or Agency Theory: CEO Governance and Shareholder Returns. *Australian journal of management*, 16(1), 49-64. doi:10.1177/031289629101600103
- Downs, A. (1967). *Inside bureaucracy* (16. printing ed.). Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books.
- Dunleavy, P. (1991). *Democracy, bureaucracy and public choice: economic explanations in political science*. London: Harvester.
- Eichbaum, C., & Shaw, R. (2008). Revisiting Politicization: Political Advisers and Public Servants in Westminster Systems. *Governance*, 21(3), 337-363. doi:10.1111/j.1468-0491.2008.00403.x

- Elgie, R. (2001). France: 'dual structure, shared dilemma'. In R. A. W. Rhodes & P. Weller (Eds.), *The changing world of top officials: mandarins or valets?* (pp. 11-40). Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Elston, T. (2017). Conflict between Explicit and Tacit Public Service Bargains in U.K. Executive Agencies. *Governance*, 30(1), 85-104. doi:10.1111/gove.12191
- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes* (2. edition ed.). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Fenno, R. F. (1990). *Watching politicians: essays on participant observation*. Berkeley, Calif.: IGS Press.
- Finance, M. o. (2015). *Code VII – Seven key duties for civil servants in central government*.
- Finansministeriet. (2006). *Centraladministrationens organisering, status og perspektiver*. Retrieved from <https://fm.dk/udgivelser/2006/marts/centraladministrationens-organisering-status-og-perspektiver/>
- Finansministeriet. (2013). *Ministrenes særlige rådgivere – et serviceeftersyn*. Retrieved from <https://fm.dk/udgivelser/2013/maj/betaenkning-nr-1537-om-ministrenes-saerlige-raadgivere-et-serviceeftersyn/>
- Finer, H. (1941). Administrative Responsibility in Democratic Government. *Public Administration Review*, 1(4), 335-350. doi:10.2307/972907
- Frederickson, H. G., & Matkin, D. S. T. (2007). Public Leadership as Gardening. In R. S. Morse, T. F. Buss, & C. M. Kinghorn (Eds.), *Transforming Public Leadership for the 21st Century* (pp. 34-46).
- Frederiksen, M. (2019). §20 spg. nr. 2071480: Statsministerens besvarelse af spørgsmål nr. 6 (UFO alm. del) stillet efter ønske fra Kristian Jensen (V), Peter Skaarup (DF) og Mai Mercado (KF). Statsministeriet
- Friedrich, C. J. (1940). Public Policy and the Nature of Administrative Responsibility. In C. J. Friedrich & E. P. Mason (Eds.), *Public Policy: A Yearbook of the Graduate School of Public Administration* (pp. 3-24): Harvard University.
- Goetz, K. (1997). Acquiring political craft: Training grounds for top officials in the German core executive. *Public Administration*, 75(4), 753-775. doi:10.1111/1467-9299.00085
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday.
- Goodnow. (1900). *Politics and Administration; A Study in Government*.
- Grube, D. C. (2019). *Megaphone Bureaucracy: Speaking Truth to Power in the Age of the New Normal*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Grøn, C. H., & Salomonsen, H. H. (2020). Organizing Central Government: A Pragmatic Meritocracy? In P. Munk Christiansen, J. Elklit, & P. Nedergaard (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of danish politics* (pp. 124-141). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Gulick, L. H. ([1936] 2003). Notes on the theory of organization. In L. H. Gulick, K. Thompson, & L. Urwick (Eds.), *Papers on the science of administration* (pp. 1-49).
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2019). *Ethnography – Principles in Practice* (Fourth ed.): Routledge.
- Hansen, M. B., & Salomonsen, H. H. (2011). The Public Service Bargains of Danish Permanent Secretaries. *Public Policy and Administration*, 26(2), 189-208. doi:10.1177/0952076710380767
- Hansen, M. B., Steen, T., & Jong, M. d. (2013). New Public Management, Public Service Bargains and the challenges of interdepartmental coordination: a comparative analysis of top civil servants in state administration. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 79(1), 29-48. doi:10.1177/0020852312467550
- Hartley, J., Alford, J., Hughes, O., & Yates, S. (2013). Leading with political astuteness: A study of public managers in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. *Australia and New Zealand School of Government and the Chartered Management Institute, UK*.
- Hartley, J., Alford, J., Hughes, O., & Yates, S. (2015). Public Value and Political Astuteness in the Work of Public Managers: The Art of the Possible. *Public Administration*, 93(1), 195-211. doi:10.1111/padm.12125
- Hartley, J., & Manzie, S. (2020). 'It's every breath we take here': Political astuteness and ethics in civil service leadership development. *Public money & management*, 40(8), 569-578. doi:10.1080/09540962.2020.1777704
- Hjarvard, S. (2013). *The mediatization of culture and society*. Oxon [England: Routledge.
- Hood, C. (2000). Paradoxes of public-sector managerialism, old public management and public service bargains. *International Public Management Journal*, 3(1), 1-22. doi:10.1016/S1096-7494(00)00032-5
- Hood, C. (2001). Public Service Managerialism: Onwards and Upwards, or 'Trobriand Cricket' Again? *The Political Quarterly*, 72(3), 300-309. doi:10.1111/1467-923X.00389
- Hood, C. (2002). Control, Bargains, and Cheating: The Politics of Public-Service Reform. *J-PART*, 12(3), 309-332. doi:10.1093/oxfordjournals.jpart.a003536
- Hood, C., & Lodge, M. (2006). *The politics of public service bargains: reward, competency, loyalty – and blame*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hustedt, T., & Salomonsen, H. H. (2014). Ensuring political responsiveness: politicization mechanisms in ministerial bureaucracies. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 80(4), 746-765. doi:10.1177/0020852314533449
- Jensen, H. (2018). *Minister – mellem ministerium og Folketing* (1. udgave. ed.). Kbh: Djøf.
- Jensen, L. (2001). Denmark: 'the island culture'. In R. A. W. Rhodes & P. Weller (Eds.), *The changing world of top officials: mandarins or valets?* (pp. 72-110). Buckingham: Open University Press.

- Jensen, L. (2003). *Den store koordinator: Finansministeriet som moderne styringsaktør* (1. udgave. ed.). Kbh: Jurist- og Økonomforbundet.
- Jensen, L. (2011). Steering from the Centre in Denmark. In C. Dahlström, B. G. Peters, & J. Pierre (Eds.), *Steering from the Centre: Strengthening Political Control in Western Democracies* (pp. 212-240). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Kiewiet, D. R., & McCubbins, M. D. (1991). *The logic of delegation : congressional parties and the appropriations process* (Repr. ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Klima-, E. o. F. (2019). Klimamål bag ny organisering. Retrieved from <https://www.regeringen.dk/nyheder/2019/ny-organisation-i-klimaministeriet-skal-understoette-ambitioese-klimamaal/>
- Knudsen, T. (2007). Den stærke statsminister. In *Fra folkestyre til markedsdemokrati. Dansk demokratihistorie efter 1973* (pp. 280-326): Akademisk Forlag.
- Kolltveit, K. (2016). Spenninger i det politisk-administrative systemet: erfaringer fra Norge. *Politica online, Årg. 48, nr. 4* (2016).
- Kreiss, D., Lawrence, R. G., & McGregor, S. C. (2018). In Their Own Words: Political Practitioner Accounts of Candidates, Audiences, Affordances, Genres, and Timing in Strategic Social Media Use. *Political Communication*, 35(1), 8-31. doi:10.1080/10584609.2017.1334727
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Interviews: learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2. ed. ed.). Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Lipsky, M. ([1980] 2010). *Street-level bureaucracy : dilemmas of the individual in public services* (30. anniversary expanded ed. ed.). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Lodge, M., & Wegrich, K. (2012). Executive Politics and Policy Instruments. In M. Lodge & K. Wegrich (Eds.), *Executive Politics in Times of Crisis* (pp. 118-135).
- Lykketoft, M. (2019). §20 spg. nr. 2063497. *Notat til Præsidiets: Om visse retlige spørgsmål i anledning af Statsministeriets brug af særlige rådgivere m.v.*
- Mangset, M., & Asdal, K. (2019). Bureaucratic power in note-writing: authoritative expertise within the state. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 70(2), 569-588. doi:10.1111/1468-4446.12356
- Maxwell, J. A. (1992). Understanding and validity in qualitative research. *Harvard educational review*, 62(3). doi:10.17763/haer.62.3.8323320856251826
- Maxwell, J. A. (2012). *A realist approach for qualitative research*. Los Angeles, Calif.: SAGE Publications.
- Maynard-Moody, S., & Musheno, M. C. (2003). *Cops, teachers, counselors : stories from the front lines of public service*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Mayntz, R., & Derlien, H.-U. (1989). Party Patronage and Politicization of the West German Administrative Elite 1970-1987 – Toward Hybridization? *Governance*, 2(4), 384-404. doi:10.1111/j.1468-0491.1989.tb00099.x
- Mayntz, R., & Scharpf, F. W. (1975). *Policy-making in the German federal bureaucracy*. Amsterdam: Elsevier.

- McCubbins, M. D., & Schwartz, T. (1984). Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols versus Fire Alarms. *American Journal of Political Science*, 28(1), 165-179. doi:10.2307/2110792
- McDonald, S. (2005). Studying actions in context: a qualitative shadowing method for organizational research. *Qualitative Research*, 5(4), 455-473. doi:10.1177/1468794105056923
- Mikecz, R. (2012). Interviewing Elites: Addressing Methodological Issues. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 18(6), 482-493. doi:10.1177/1077800412442818
- Miller, G. J. (2005). The Political Evolution of Principal-Agent Models. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 8(1), 203-225. doi:10.1146/annurev.polisci.8.082103.104840
- Mintzberg, H. (1971). Managerial Work: Analysis from Observation. *Management Science*, 18(2), B-97-B-110. doi:10.1287/mnsc.18.2.B97
- Mitnick, B. M. (1975). The Theory of Agency: The Policing "Paradox" and Regulatory Behavior. *Public Choice*, 24, 27-42.
- Moe, T. M. (1984). The New Economics of Organization. *American Journal of Political Science*, 28(4), 739-777. doi:10.2307/2110997
- Moore, M. H. (2013). *Recognizing Public Value*. Cumberland: Harvard University Press.
- Mortensen, P. B. (2019). Statens Forvaltning. In J. Blom-Hansen, P. M. Christiansen, T. Pallesen, & S. Serritzlew (Eds.), *Offentlig forvaltning: et politologisk perspektiv* (2. udgave. ed.). Kbh: Hans Reitzel.
- Niskanen, W. A. (1971). *Bureaucracy & representative government* (1. pbk. ed. ed.). New Brunswick, NJ: Aldine Transaction.
- Noordegraaf, M. (2000). Professional sense-makers: managerial competencies amidst ambiguity. *The International journal of public sector management*, 13(4), 319-332. doi:10.1108/09513550010350292
- Noordegraaf, M. (2007). Men at Work: How Public Policy Managers Cope. In R. A. W. Rhodes, P. 't Hart, & M. Noordegraaf (Eds.), *Observing Government Elites: Up Close and Personal* (pp. 78-102). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Ostrander, S. A. (1995). "Surely You're Not in This Just to Be Helpful" – Access, Rapport, and Interviews in Three Studies of Elites. In R. Hertz & J. B. Imber (Eds.), *Studying elites using qualitative methods* (pp. 133-150). Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Page, E. (2012). *Policy without politicians: bureaucratic influence in comparative perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Page, E., & Jenkins, W. I. (2007). *Policy bureaucracy: government with a cast of thousands*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- The Parliamentary Electoral System in Denmark*. (2011). In J. Elklit, A. B. Pade, & N. N. Miller (Eds.).
- Putnam, R. D. (1976). *The comparative study of political elites*. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall.
- Rhodes, R. A. W. (2011). *Everyday life in British government*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Rhodes, R. A. W. (2016a). Ethnography. In M. Bevir & R. A. W. Rhodes (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Interpretive Political Science*: Routledge
- Rhodes, R. A. W. (2016b). Recovering the Craft of Public Administration. *Public Administration Review*, 76(4), 638-647. doi:10.1111/puar.12504
- Rhodes, R. A. W., & Salomonsen, H. H. (2021). Duopoly, court politics and the Danish core executive. *Public administration (London)*, 99(1), 72-86. doi:10.1111/padm.12685
- Robert, A., Dacin, M. T., & Ira, C. H. (1997). Agents as Stewards. *The Academy of Management review*, 22(3), 609-611.
- Salomonsen, H. H., Frandsen, F., & Johansen, W. (2016). Civil Servant Involvement in the Strategic Communication of Central Government Organizations: Mediatization and Functional Politicization. *International journal of strategic communication*, 10(3), 207-221. doi:10.1080/1553118X.2016.1176568
- Salomonsen, H. H., & Knudsen, T. (2011). Changes in Public Service Bargains: Ministers and Civil Servants in Denmark. *Public Administration*, 89(3), 1015-1035. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9299.2011.01925.x
- Schaffer, B. (1973). *The administrative factor: papers in organization, politics, and development*. London: Frank Cass.
- Schaffer, F. C. (2015). *Elucidating Social Science Concepts: An Interpretivist Guide* (1 ed. Vol. 4). Milton: Routledge.
- Schillemans, T. (2012). Moving Beyond The Clash of Interests: On stewardship theory and the relationships between central government departments and public agencies. *Public management review*, 15(4), 541-562. doi:10.1080/14719037.2012.691008
- Schwartz-Shea, P., & Yanow, D. (2012). *Interpretive research design: concepts and processes*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Shaw, R., & Eichbaum, C. (2018). Introduction: ministers, minders, and mandarins. In R. Shaw & C. Eichbaum (Eds.), *Ministers, Minders, and Mandarins: An International Study of Relationships at the Executive Study of Parliamentary Democracies*: Edward Elgar.
- Shaw, R., & Eichbaum, C. (2020a). Bubbling up or cascading down? Public servants, political advisers and politicization. *Public administration (London)*, 98(4), 840-855. doi:10.1111/padm.12659
- Shaw, R., & Eichbaum, C. (2020b). From ménage à trois back to pas de deux? Ministerial advisers, civil servants and the contest of policy ideas. *International Review of Public Policy*, 2(3), 264-280. doi:10.4000/irpp.1502
- Simon, H. A. ([1945] 1997). *Administrative behavior : a study of decision-making processes in administrative organizations* (4.ed. ed.). New York, N.Y: Free Press.
- Smith-Udvalget, B. (2015). *Embedsmanden i det moderne folkestyre* (1. udg. ed.). Kbh: Jurist- og Økonomforbundet.

- Statsministeriet. (2016). *Regler for ansættelse af særlige rådgivere*. Retrieved from https://modst.dk/media/29496/regler-for-ansaettelse-af-saerlige-raadgivere-2016_1.pdf
- Statsministeriet. (2019). Organisationsudvidelse i Statsministeriet [Press release]. Retrieved from https://www.stm.dk/_p_14851.html
- Statsministeriet. (2021). Regeringsudvalg. Retrieved from <https://www.stm.dk/regeringen/regeringsudvalg/>
- Steen, T., & Van der Meer, F. (2011). Public service bargains in Dutch top civil service. *Public Policy and Administration*, 26(2), 209-232. doi:10.1177/0952076710380766
- Strøm, K., Müller, W. C., & Bergman, T. (2003). *Delegation and accountability in parliamentary democracies* *Comparative politics*.
- 't Hart, P. (2014). The Work of Public Leadership. In P. t. Hart (Ed.), *Understanding public leadership*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ;New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- 't Hart, P., & Wille, A. (2006). Ministers and Top Officials in the Dutch Core Executive: Living Together, Growing Apart? *Public Administration*, 84(1), 121-146. doi:10.1111/j.0033-3298.2006.00496.x
- Tavory, I., & Timmermans, S. (2014). *Abductive analysis: theorizing qualitative research*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Trangbæk, A. (2021). *Does the cradle of power exist? Sequence analysis of top bureaucrats' career trajectories*. Working paper.
- Van der Wal, Z. (2017). *The 21st Century Public Manager*. London: Macmillan Education.
- Van der Wal, Z. (2020). Being a Public Manager in Times of Crisis: The Art of Managing Stakeholders, Political Masters, and Collaborative Networks. *Public Administration Review*, 80(5), 759-764. doi:10.1111/puar.13245
- van Dorp, E.-J. (2018). Trapped in the hierarchy: the craft of Dutch city managers. *Public management review*, 20(8), 1228-1245. doi:10.1080/14719037.2017.1383783
- van Dorp, E. J., & 't Hart, P. (2019). Navigating the dichotomy: The top public servant's craft. *Public Administration*, 97(4), 877-891. doi:10.1111/padm.12600
- Van Slyke, D. M. (2006). Agents or Stewards: Using Theory to Understand the Government-Nonprofit Social Service Contracting Relationship. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 17(2), 157-187. doi:10.1093/jopart/mulo12
- Waterman, R. W., & Meier, K. J. (1998). Principal-Agent Models: An Expansion? *J-PART*, 8(2), 173-202. doi:10.1093/oxfordjournals.jpart.a024377
- Weber, M. (1968 [1921]). *Economy and society: An outline of interpretative sociology*. New York: Bedminster Press.
- Weber, M. ([1922] 1993). *From Max Weber: essays in sociology* (H. H. Gerth & C. W. Mills Eds.). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Wille, A. C. (2013a). *The normalization of the European Commission: politics and bureaucracy in the EU executive*.

- Wille, A. C. (2013b). *The normalization of the European Commission: politics and bureaucracy in the EU executive* (First edition ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wilson, W. (1887). The Study of Administration. *Political Science Quarterly*, 2(2), 197-222. doi:10.2307/2139277
- Wilson, W. J., & Chaddha, A. (2009). The role of theory in ethnographic research. *Ethnography*, 10(4), 549-564. doi:10.1177/1466138109347009
- Ybema, S., Yanow, D., Wels, H., & Kamsteeg, F. (2009). *Organizational ethnography: studying the complexities of everyday life*. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Öhberg, P., Christiansen, P. M., & Niklasson, B. (2016). Administrative politicization or contestability? How political advisors affect neutral competence in policy processes: administrative politicization or contestability? *Public Administration*, 269-285. doi:10.1111/padm.12253

Appendix A:

Topic guides

Topic guide for permanent secretaries	
	<p>Ensure agreement about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can I record the interview - Confidentiality - What the interview can be used for - (Read GDPR statement)
Opening question	<p>Thinking back, what do you think was the reason that you were chosen as permanent secretary in [ministry]?</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Do you remember what your expectations were to becoming permanent secretary?</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Did you know that you wanted to become permanent secretary?</p>
	<p>As I understand it, you were hired as permanent secretary in [year]. What has been the biggest change in the job as permanent secretary since then?</p> <p><i>[Mapping and mining]</i></p>
	<p>What is the most important change you have made since you became permanent secretary?</p> <p><i>[Have you made any changes since you became permanent secretary? Can you elaborate that? Can you give examples of that? Why did you choose to do it in that way?]</i></p>
- Changes	
Everyday life	<p>Which tasks take up most of your time in your everyday life?</p> <p><i>[Mining]</i></p>
	<p>When you are alone in the office: what do you spend your time on?</p>
	<p>What kind of cases do you process before they reach the minister?</p>
- Handling of cases	<p>When you handle a case, can you tell me: what is the criteria for deciding passing it on to the minister?</p> <p><i>[What do you look for? When do you send a case back to the ministry? What characterizes a 'good' case? How do you give feedback?]</i></p> <p><i>[What is your focus? – Legality, the political or?]</i></p>

- Meetings with political spokespersons	<p>I've heard from others in the ministries that permanent secretaries often participate in the minister's meetings with political spokespersons. Do you do that as well?</p> <p>If yes: Why do you participate in those meetings?</p> <p><i>[What do you write down? What do you get out of participating in the meetings? How does the minister benefit from your presence? What knowledge do you get that you could not get from an elaborate summary from a skilled administrative officer?]</i></p>
- Managing the ministry	<p>In most ministries, some tasks are categorized as part of the daily operations. What would that be in your ministry?</p> <p>How involved are you in the daily operations?</p> <p><i>[How much time do you spend on this compared to the political?]</i></p> <p>Can you tell more about the collaboration with the board of manager/division heads/agency director?</p> <p><i>[What do you discuss? How often do you meet?]</i></p> <p>What is the biggest difference between being division head and permanent secretary?</p>
- Relation to the minister	<p>What is your most important task in relation to assisting the minister?</p>
- Political counselling	<p>In recent years, there have been a recurrent debate about whether you, as permanent secretary, spend too much time and too many resources on providing political advice to the minister. What are your thoughts about that?</p> <p><i>[Note how they interpret 'political' – ask about Political-tactical]</i></p>
- Different ministers	<p>I can see that you have served under [number] ministers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [minister] (party) (period) <p>What are the consequences for you, as permanent secretary, to have changing ministers?</p> <p>Are there any characteristics about the ministers that entails you having to deal with them in different ways?</p> <p><i>[Clarify: I am not thinking about political differences.] [Mapping/mining]</i></p> <p>How do you onboard a new minister?</p> <p>What is your point of attention when a new minister is appointed?</p> <p><i>[If relevant: What does it mean when there is frequent replacement of ministers]</i></p>

Relations to other actors	<p>We have talked about your relation to the minister. Aside from the minister: who is your most important actor in your everyday life?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Special advisor - Division heads - External actors (interest organizations, institutions etc.) - Media - Other ministries <p><i>[Mapping and mining → 'Why is he/she important to you?', 'Can you elaborate on that?', 'Can you provide an example', 'Are there other important actors?']</i></p> <p><i>[I have noticed that [person] spends a lot of time in your office. Why?]</i></p>
Special advisors	<p>I would like to talk about your relation to the special advisor. Can you tell me about your relation to the special advisor?</p> <hr/> <p>You have worked for several ministers; hence, I assume there has been several special advisors. What does it mean to you who is the special advisor?</p> <p>How much are you in contact with the special advisor?</p>
Media	<p>What is your relation to the media in your everyday work?</p>
Standing government committees	<p>The minister is a member of [mention the permanent government committees]</p> <p>What is your duty as permanent secretary in the preparatory government committee meetings? Is there a difference between the various preparatory government committee meetings?</p> <p>Do you participate in the government committee meetings? What is your role at those meetings?</p> <p><i>[How does your role differ from the role in the preparatory government committees? When do you participate in government committee meetings?]</i></p>
- Relation to other permanent secretaries and other ministries	<p>Are there any permanent secretaries you have more contact with than others? Who?</p> <p><i>[Why? How? PMO? How well did you know the other permanent secretaries before you became permanent secretary?]</i></p> <hr/> <p>I have heard that the permanent secretaries have a monthly lunch meeting. Can you tell me why you have those meetings?</p> <p><i>[What do you do at the meetings? Who decides the agenda?]</i></p> <hr/> <p>I have participated in a meeting in the preparatory government coordination committee meeting (FKU). I sensed a hierarchy among the permanent secretaries. Is that something you can recognize?</p> <p><i>[Can you elaborate? What is your place in the hierarchy?]</i></p>

We often talk about the 'strength/forces' of permanent secretaries. How would you describe a 'strong/forceful' permanent secretary?

Ending the interview

[Look through topic guide to see if I have forgot to ask about anything]

Now, we enter the last part of the interview. However, I do have a couple of questions left;

What has surprised you the most about being a permanent secretary?

Are there anything you would like for people to know about the position as permanent secretary?

If you can choose only one thing: what is the best part about being permanent secretary?

If you could change one thing in your job, what would it be?

I do not have any more questions. Are there anything you would like to add?

[Thank you and outro]

Topic guide for division heads	
	<p>Ensure agreement about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can I record the interview - Confidentiality - What the interview can be used for <p>(Read GDPR statement)</p>
Opening question - Why you?	Can you tell me a bit about your responsibilities and tasks? <i>[Mining]</i>
	What were your expectations regarding the position as division head?
	Do you know why you were hired as division head?
	Can you tell me about your relation and collaboration with the permanent secretary?
Everyday life Case handling	As far as I understand, your cases are processed through F2 (an IT-system).
	What is your focus when you handle a case?
	What do you expect the permanent secretary to focus on when she handles a case?
	What happens if the permanent secretary returns a case to you?
- Internal meetings	What do you expect of the permanent secretary, when she participates in meetings with you and the other division heads?
	What do the permanent secretary expect from you at those meetings?
The relation to the permanent secretary	What do you believe to be the most important task of the permanent secretary?
	When are you in contact with the permanent secretary?
	How are you in contact with the permanent secretary? (Text, call, e-mail etc.)
	How easy/difficult is it to get hold of the permanent secretary?
	How much contact do you have with the permanent secretary during nights and weekends? <i>[Why are you in contact?]</i>
	What is the biggest difference between being division head and permanent secretary? <i>[Can you elaborate on that?]</i>

- Political counsel	<p>In recent years, there have been a recurrent debate about whether you, as permanent secretary, spend too much time and too many resources on providing political advice to the minister. What are your thoughts about that?</p> <p><i>[Note how they interpret 'political' – ask about Political-tactical]</i></p>
- Relation to minister, other permanent secretaries, and other ministries	<p>How much are you in contact with the minister?</p> <p><i>[Which situations? How often?]</i></p> <p>How are you in contact with the other permanent secretaries?</p> <p><i>[Who? How often?]</i></p> <p>We often talk about the 'strength/forces' of permanent secretaries. How would you describe a 'strong/forceful' permanent secretary?</p>
Ending the interview	<p><i>[Look through topic guide to see if I have forgot to ask about anything]</i></p> <p>Now, we enter the last part of the interview. However, I do have one question left;</p> <p>If you could change one thing about the permanent secretary's job that would make your everyday life better – what would it be?</p> <p>I do not have any more questions. Are there anything you would like to add?</p> <p><i>[Thank you and outro]</i></p>

Topic guide – ministers	
	<p>Ensure agreement about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can I record the interview - Confidentiality - What the interview can be used for <p>(Read GDPR statement)</p>
Opening questions	<p>Who are the most important relations in your everyday life?</p> <hr/> <p>What do you expect of the permanent secretary, when she participates in the political negotiations?</p> <p><i>[Example if I have one]</i></p> <p><i>[When do you ask the permanent secretary to assist you and when do you ask the division head?]</i></p> <hr/> <p>- Everyday life</p> <p>What do you expect the permanent secretary to focus on when she handles a case?</p> <hr/> <p>What do you expect of the permanent secretary, when she participates in meetings with external actors?</p> <p><i>[When do you ask the permanent secretary to assist you and when do you ask the division head?]</i></p> <hr/>
Relation to permanent secretary	<p>What do you believe to be the most important task of the permanent secretary?</p> <hr/> <p>What is the biggest difference in what you discuss with the permanent secretary and the special advisor?</p> <hr/> <p>You have been minister several times, and had various permanent secretaries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name, ministry <p>If you can say only one thing, what is the biggest difference between the permanent secretaries?</p> <p>How does it affect how you are assisted as minister?</p> <hr/>
- Political counsel	<p>In recent years, there have been a recurrent debate about whether you, as permanent secretary, spend too much time and too many resources on providing political advice to the minister. What are your thoughts about that?</p> <p><i>[Note how they interpret ‘political’ – ask about Political-tactical]</i></p> <hr/> <p>How are you in contact with the other permanent secretaries?</p> <p><i>[Who? How often?]</i></p>

- Relation to other permanent secretaries and other ministries	<p>We often talk about the 'strength/forces' of permanent secretaries. How would you describe a 'strong/forceful' permanent secretary?</p> <hr/> <p>Which characteristics or qualities do you believe to be most important for permanent secretaries?</p>
	<p>How much contact do you have with the permanent secretary during nights and weekends? <i>[Why are you in contact?]</i></p>
Government Committees	<p>You are a member of [mention the permanent government committees]. How does it affect your position as minister?</p> <p>How do you prepare for the meetings?</p> <p><i>[Discuss it with the permanent secretary? Coordinate with the special advisor? Do you coordinate with the permanent secretary before he participates in the preparatory meetings? When the permanent secretary has participated in the meetings in the preparatory government committees, what happens then?]</i></p>
	<p><i>[Look through topic guide to see if I have forgot to ask about anything]</i></p>
Ending the interview	<p>Now, we enter the last part of the interview. However, I do have one question left;</p> <p>If you could change one thing about the permanent secretary's job that would make your everyday life better – what would it be?</p> <hr/> <p>I do not have any more questions. Are there anything you would like to add?</p> <p><i>[Thank you and outro]</i></p>

Appendix B:

Guidelines for transcription

Table B1. Transcription symbols for interviews

Symbol	Example	Explanation
...		Short pauses in the interview
[]	[laughing]	Notes things that happened during the interviews.
Word	I am responsible.	Bold and italics indicate emphasis by the interviewee.
<i>Word</i>	<i>I am responsible.</i>	
(...)		A part of the quote is not relevant and was omitted by the author.
	Mmh	Interjections should be noted down when transcribing.
	Ehhh	
Text [word, AT]	... they [the permanent secretaries, AT] meet once a week	This means I have added something, to make it easier to read and understand.
Name		Names have been replaced by position.
Footnote		Examples are removed and either replaced by a more generic example or simply removed. This is marked by a footnote.

The transcription symbols are also visible in the quotes. However, interjections have been omitted from the quotes.

Table B2. Excerpts from fieldnotes

Symbol	Example	Explanation
'sentence'		Paraphrasing of speech. There are not quotes in the field excerpts.
(...)		A part of the excerpt is not relevant and was omitted by the author.
Footnote		Examples are removed and either replaced by a more generic example or simply removed. This is marked by a footnote.

Appendix C:

Coding scheme

Relation	No.	Code	Subcode	Dansk subcode	Description
Upwards	1	What the minister wants	What does the minister need?	Hvad efterspørger ministeren (mere af)?	Any reference to the minister expressing something he/she needs, e.g. help to develop policy, help to negotiate etc.
Upwards	2	Overall objectives	Make the minister succeed	Får M til at blive en succes.	Any reference to the permanent secretary having to make sure the minister can
Upwards	3	Overall objectives	Protect the minister	Beskytte ministeren	Any reference to the permanent secretary having to protect the minister and/or the government.
Upwards	4	Relationship	The minister as the superior	Ministeren er chefen	Any reference to the minister being the superior of the permanent secretary, i.e. the permanent secretary orientates himself towards the minister.
Upwards	5	Relationship	Trust	Tillid	Any reference to the importance of trust in the relationship

6	Relationship	Personal chemistry	Personlig kemi	Any reference to the importance of having (good) personal chemistry
7	Relationship	Respect	Respekt	Any reference to mutual respect towards one another
8	Relationship	Appreciate each other situation	Have forståelse for hinandens jobposition	Any reference to the minister or the permanent secretary expressing that they appreciate the work pressure, the many decisions, the information overload, the work being extremely hard or similar
9	Relationship	Honesty and transparency	Ærlighed og transparens	Any reference to the importance of an honest relationship between the minister and the permanent secretary, e.g. that non-disclosure is bad craftsmanship.
10	Relationship		At forstå ministeren	Any reference to the permanent secretary trying to understand the minister, i.e. listen to the minister, understand who the person is, how they work, try to 'forstå' the minister etc.
11	Relationship		Tilpasse sig ministeren	Any reference to the permanent secretary trying to not only understand what the minister want, but also trying to figure out how best to serve the minister. How can her wishes be accommodated. How can the ministry ease the everyday-life for the minister
12	Relationship		Ministerens forståelse af ministeriet	Any reference to the permanent secretary or others trying to brief the minister on what

Upwards	13	Relationship	Loyalitet	Any reference to the importance of the permanent secretary being loyal towards the minister
Upwards	21	Solving cases/day-to-day 'minister-betjening'	Skære sagerne, så de passer til ministeren	Any reference to the permanent secretary trying to fit the case to what the permanent secretary thinks the minister wants, e.g. asking bureaucrats to add or remove options to the case to make it fit better with the political 'linje' etc..
Upwards	22	Solving cases	Knowing the details Være nede i detaljen	Any reference to the permanent secretary adhering to small details, e.g. asking lower ranking bureaucrats to elaborate something either using F2 or at a meeting, asking other bureaucrats to add something to the case etc.
Upwards	23	Solving cases	Assure the basis of decision is sufficient Kvalitetssikre beslutningsgrundlaget	Any reference to the permanent secretary trying to ensure that the quality of a case is on a sufficient level, including balancing between time spent on a case versus getting things done. Making sure the case contains the relevant considerations, e.g. about process, comparative cases (internationally or locally?), the law, economy etc. Also considerations about whether the case builds on the right criteria. Ensure the most important things (from a professional perspective) is included
Upwards	24	Solving cases	Think across Tænke på tværs af Slotsholmen	Any reference to the permanent secretary thinking across about different issues.
	25	Solving cases	Weighing the different considerations against each other Afveje forskellige hensyn	Any reference to the permanent secretary or minister experiencing a trade off between the different types of advice, e.g. political – tactical advice versus professional advice

26	Solving cases	Sikre læsevenlighed	Any reference to the permanent secretary focusing on making it easier to read a case, e.g. by ensuring the problem is stated clearly, by making sure the solution is clearly presented, by making sure the arguments are easy to follow etc.
27	Solving cases	Løser vi faktisk et problem?	
28	Solving cases	Processen	
29	Solving cases	Inddrages relevante interessenter	
30	At meetings	Lytte	Any reference to the permanent secretary participating in meetings to just listen and observe
31	At meetings	Skrive noter	Any reference to the permanent secretary participating in the meeting to take notes
32	At meetings	Bidrage med faglig rådgivning	Any reference to the permanent secretary participating in meetings to assist the minister with potential professional questions, either technical questions, questions to the area of the ministry (ressortområdet) or similar

33	At meetings	Take part in the meetings on equal terms as the minister	Any reference to the permanent secretary taking part in the meeting on equal terms as the minister
34	At meetings	Be a passive stand in for the minister	Any reference to the permanent secretary acting as a stand in for the minister at meetings, i.e. attend to listen, observe, and bring back information
35	At meetings	Be an active stand in for the minister	Any reference to the permanent secretary acting as an active stand in for the minister, i.e. voicing the minister's or the party's opinions on a subject.
36	At meetings		Any reference to the permanent secretary trying to equip the minister to the meeting
37	At meetings		Any reference to the importance of professional back-and-forth after the meetings
38	At meetings	Sikre efterfølgende opsamlings	Any reference to the permanent secretary ensuring that the ministry act on the decisions at the meetings
39	At meetings	Sikre lovlighed	Any reference to the importance that the permanent secretary ensures 'lovlighed'

40	Minister	Godkende sager	Any reference to the minister approving cases, e.g. statements about how many cases they approve, if they have time to read the cases etc.
41	Minister	Politisk chef	Any reference to the minister being the political manager in the ministry
42	Minister	Forvaltningschef	Any reference to the minister being the administrative manager in the ministry
43	Minister	Tager ejerskab over ministeriet	Any reference to the minister trying to take ownership of the ministry
44	Minister	Lægger afstand til ministeriet	Any reference to the minister
45	Political-administrative dichotomy	Ministeren giver legitimitet	Any reference to who brings legitimacy to the decisions
45	Political-administrative dichotomy	Departementschefen giver legitimitet	Any reference to who brings legitimacy to the decisions

46	Political-administrative dichotomy	Lay down the framework for policy	Sætte rammerne for politikken	Any reference to the permanent secretary laying down the framework for the policy
47	Political-administrative dichotomy	Liberate the minister from day-to-day-management	Frigøre ministeren fra driften	Any reference to the importance of making sure the minister does not have to be involved in the day-to-day-management of the ministry, e.g. references to other bureaucrats handling administrative tasks, to practical decision being made on a lower level etc.
48	Political-administrative dichotomy	Minister develops policy	Ministeren laver politik	Any reference to the minister developing- and formulating policy
49	Political-administrative dichotomy		Ministerens involvering i driften	
50	Political-administrative dichotomy		Departementschefen assisterer ministeren med politikudvikling	
51	Political-administrative dichotomy	Minister is powerless against the ministry	Ministeren er magtesløs overfor ministeriet	Any reference to the minister experiencing to be powerless against the system, e.g. when they feel pressured to approve cases, when they experience the system to drag out case solving, when cases important to the minister is postponed etc.
52	Political-administrative dichotomy	The permanent secretary has too much control of the ministry	Departementschefen vil gerne sætte retning for politikken	Any reference to the minister experiencing that the permanent secretary tries to control too much, e.g. when the permanent secretary offers the minister a fund 'to spend on policy-issues', any permanent secretary explaining 'where the ministry comes from and where they want to go' etc.

53	Political-administrative dichotomy	It is for the minister to make decisions	Ministeren bestemmer	Any reference to the minister being in charge, e.g. the minister needs to chart out a course for the ministry, the minister makes the final decision, the ministry comply with the minister's decisions etc.
56	Political-administrative dichotomy	The minister trying to (re)gain control through work routines	Ministeren forsøger at (gen)vinde kontrollen	Any reference to the minister setting up new work routines in order to feel more in control
57	Political-administrative dichotomy	Minister's involvement in hiring and firing	Ministerens involvering i at hyre og fyre	Any reference to the minister being involved in hiring or firing the permanent secretary and other high level bureaucrats. This involves both possibilities to hire and fire.
58	Political-administrative dichotomy	The impact through 'beslutningsgrundlag	Indflydelse gnm. Forberedelse til beslutningsgrundlag	Any reference to the potential power lying in the preparation of cases for the government
	Political-administrative dichotomy		Ministeriets sager'	
59	Responsibility/Accountability		Ministerens ansvar	
60	Responsibility/Accountability		Departementschefens ansvar	

14	Counselling	Political-tactical advice	Politisk-taktisk rådgivning	Any reference to the permanent secretary giving political-tactical advice to the minister, e.g. how to construct the law so it best fits with the minister's politics, how the minister can cultivate his/hers political relations (interest organisations, political spokespeople, other ministers etc.), how 'enkeltsager' could potentially blow up and therefore needs special attention, how to obtain a majority in parliament. Any reference to the permanent secretary giving party-political advice, e.g. advice on the political backing [politisk bagland] etc.
15	Counselling	Party-political advice	Partipolitisk rådgivning	
16	Counselling	Professional advice	Faglig rådgivning	Any reference to the permanent secretary giving professional advice to the minister
17	Counselling	Legal advice	Juridisk rådgivning	Any reference to the permanent secretary advising the minister on legal issues, e.g. making sure the minister obeys the law
18	Counselling	Administrative advice	Forvaltningsmæssig rådgivning	Any reference to the permanent secretary giving advice on administrative issues, e.g. whether it is possible to manage a law in practice (not whether it is legal), how the ministry works, what an initiative would mean for practitioners etc.
19	Counselling	Advice on communication	Kommunikationsrådgivning	Any reference to the permanent secretary giving advice on communications, e.g. whether a minister should go on television, how much a minister can say without being unpopular against other ministers, what the media wrote/said about the minister/ministry and possible responses, whether a minister should engage in a public debate etc.

20	Counselling	Advice on the minister's relations	Relationsrådgiver	Any reference to the permanent secretary giving advice to the minister about the relations to other actors in the political system, e.g. political spokespeople, interest organisations etc.
66	Roles	Partner for discussion	Sparringspartner	Any reference to the permanent secretary acting as a partner of discussion, i.e. more than just giving advice.
67	Roles	Being the minister's right-hand man/woman	Ministerens højre hånd	Any reference to the permanent secretary being the nearest and highest placed subordinate assisting with whatever the minister needs – big and small
68	Roles	Connector – Being the link between the ministry and the minister	Bindeled mellem minister og ministerium	Any references to the permanent secretary acting as the link between the ministry and the minister, i.e. translating the minister's wishes downwards in the ministry, translating messages from the ministry, interpret the minister's policy, decide the weight of the minister's word, acting as the filter between the minister and ministry (both upwards and downwards), making sure the minister is realistic about the amount of work for the ministry etc.
69	Roles	Promoter	Promoter	Any reference to the permanent secretary trying to ensure that the minister and/or ministry get's good press, credit for new policy initiatives, backing the minister up at meetings, enhancing the minister's political results etc.
70	Roles	Sweeper/Sweeping	Fejer (lånt fra curling)	Any reference to the permanent secretary trying to sweep away obstacles for the minister, in order to ease the minister's path and make sure the minister maximize the time spend on policy and politics instead of the operation of the ministry, instead of spending time on incomplete basis of decisions etc.

Upwards	71	Roles	Substitute	Stedfortræder	Any reference to the permanent secretary acting as the substitute for the minister, e.g. actually taking the place of the minister at meetings, representing the minister in meeting fora where the minister does not come
Upwards	72	Roles	Advisor	Rådgiver	
Upwards	73	Roles		Sagsknuser	
Upwards		Roles		CEO for ministeriet	
		Roles		Figur ud mod omverdenen	
Upwards	74	Shaping the role		Ministerens ledelsessstil	
Upwards	75	Shaping the role		Det politiske projekt	

Upwards	76	Shaping the role	Minister's calendar	Ministerens kalender	Any reference to the permanent secretary's everyday life being dependent on the minister's schedule, e.g. a meeting changing in the minister's calendar meaning changes in the permanent secretary's schedule, change of content in the minister's meeting meaning the permanent secretary's schedule change etc. Any reference to the minister's working routine changing the working routine of the permanent secretary.
Upwards	77	Shaping the role	Minister's work routines	Ministerens arbejdsrutine	
Upwards	78	Shaping the role	Minister's committee memberships	Ministerens medlemskab af regeringsudvalg	Any reference to the permanent secretary's everyday life changing due to the minister's position in a government committee
Upwards	79	Shaping the role	Matching of expectations	Forventningsafstemning	Any reference to the permanent secretary and the minister matching their expectations, e.g. initial talks, reading books by the minister, getting to know one another etc.
Upwards	80	Shaping the role	The type of government	Regeringstype	Any reference to the type of government (flertal versus enkeltpartiregering) shaping the role of the permanent secretary
	81	Other		Hvad kan vi mene?	
Upwards	82	Other			Any reference to the permanent secretary working for the minister even when the minister is not in the room

Outwards	57	Media	In the limelight during 'messy cases'	I rampelyset ved møgsager	Any reference to the permanent secretary being in the limelight during messy cases
Outwards	58	Media	Try to stay out of limelight	Forsøger at holde sig ude af rampelyset	Any reference to the permanent secretary trying to stay out of the limelight, e.g. saying no to interviews
Outwards	59	Media	Be updated on the news	Holde sig opdateret på nyhederne	Any reference to the permanent secretary being updated on the news, whether it be on the radio, on television, in the paper, or similar.
Outwards	60	Media	Be able to handle the media	Skal kunne håndtere medierne	Any reference to the permanent secretary's ability to handle the media
Outwards	61	Interest organizations	Represent the minister	Repræsentere ministeren	Any reference to the permanent secretary acting as the minister's representative, e.g. by referring a lot to the minister, by discussing issues on behalf of the minister etc.
Outwards	62	Interest organizations	Represent the ministry	Repræsentere ministeriet	Any reference to the permanent secretary acting as the ministry's representative, e.g. by referring to the ministry's resources, long time of collaboration etc.
Outwards	63	Interest organizations	Collaborate	Samarbejde	Any reference to the permanent secretaries collaborating with interest organization, e.g. by engaging in professional feedback, by hosting meetings with interest organization

Outwards	64	Interest organizations	Partner analysis	Interessentanalyse	Any references to the permanent secretary actively involving the interest organization in the ministry's work through a partner analysis
Outwards	65	Interest organizations	Does not interact	Interagerer ikke med interesseorganisationer	Any reference to the permanent secretary not engaging himself/herself in the work with interest organization, e.g. not taking part in meetings, not having contact with the interest organization on text, calls etc.
Outwards	66	Prime Minister's Office	Prime Minister as superior	Statsministerien	Any reference to the permanent secretary considering the Prime Minister as his/her superior who can give directions.
Outwards	67	Prime Minister's Office	Collaboration with the Prime Minister's Office	Samarbejde med Statsministeriet	Any reference to the collaboration with the Prime Minister's Office, e.g. (secret) meeting at the Prime Minister's Office, continuous close collaboration with PMO etc.
Outwards	68	Prime Minister's Office	Involvement of Prime Minister's Office	Statsministeriets indblanding	Any reference to the Prime Minister's Office being more involved than other ministries, e.g. when they take the liberty to involve themselves in the cases of other ministries
Outwards	69	The Finance Ministry	Collaboration with the Finance Ministry	Samarbejdet med finansministeriet	Any reference to the collaboration with the Finance Ministry, e.g. negotiations
Outwards	70	The Finance Ministry	The special position of the Finance Ministry	Finansministeriets særlige position	Any reference to the Finance Ministry's special position in the ministerial hierarchy

Outwards	71	Other ministries	Exploring the ground	Sondere terrænet	Any references to the permanent secretary exploring the ground of other ministries/ministers, e.g. trying to pick up their position on a given case in the government committee
Outwards	72	Other ministries	Coordinate	Koordinere	Any reference to the permanent secretary coordinating with bureaucrats in other ministries.
Outwards	73	Other ministries	Professional competency	Faglig sparring	Any reference to professional feedback on a given case.
Outwards	74	Other ministries	Attend to the minister's preferences	Varetage ministerens interesser	Any reference to the permanent secretary attending to the minister's interest, e.g. in preparatory government committees,
Outwards	75	Other ministries	The minister's extended memory	Ministerens hukommelse	Any reference to the permanent secretary acting as the memory of the minister, e.g. when asked about the history on a case, what other ministries said etc.
Outwards	76	Other ministries	Read the room	Læse rummet	Any reference to the permanent secretary reading the room, e.g. at coordination meetings.
Outwards	77	Government	Link between government and the ministry	Bindeled mellem regeringen og departementet	Any reference to the permanent secretary serving as the link between the government and the ministry

Outwards	78	Government	The government as superior	Regeringen som chef	Any reference to the permanent secretary considering the government as his/her superior who can give directions.
Outwards	79	Parliament	The parliament as superior	Folketinget som chef	Any reference to the permanent secretary considering the parliament as his/her superior who can give directions.
Outwards	80	Other permanent secretaries	The special position of the permanent secretary in the Prime Minister's Office	Statsministeriets departementschefs særlige position	Any reference to the permanent secretary in the prime minister's office having a special status, e.g. 'the head' of the permanent secretaries, special status when receiving a call from the PS in PMO etc.
Outwards	81	Other permanent secretaries	Collaboration	Samarbejde	Any references to the permanent secretaries collaborating, e.g. giving professional feedback, asking questions to each other, asking favours of each other
Outwards	82	Other permanent secretaries	Network	Netværk	Any references to the importance of knowing the other permanent secretaries well, e.g. having a history together, having a personal chemistry, knowing each other well etc.
Outwards	83	Other permanent secretaries	Trust and solidarity	Tillid og sammenhold	Any reference to the permanent secretaries building trust and solidarity, e.g. when they confide in each other, sympathise with each other, are honest with each other etc.
Outwards	84	Other permanent secretaries	Strategic interaction	Strategisk interaktion	Any reference to the interaction being of a strategic character, e.g. when the permanent secretary text the PS in PMO/MoF to deposit ministerial 'points', when the permanent secretary tries to clear up potential misunderstanding between ministries etc.

Outwards	85	Other permanent secretaries	Power struggles	Magtkampe	Any reference to power struggles between permanent secretaries, e.g. stories about 'battles', confrontational behaviour at meetings etc.
Outwards	86	Other permanent secretaries	Previous permanent secretaries	Tidligere departementschefer	Any reference to how previous permanent secretaries work, e.g. if they were more or less involved in politics.
Outwards	87	Other politicians	Interacting with political spokespeople	Samarbejde med ordførere	Any reference to the permanent secretary talking to political spokespeople without the presence of the minister
Outwards	88	Other politicians	Interacting with political spokespeople with minister	Samarbejde med ordførere sammen med ministeren	Any reference to the permanent secretary interacting with political spokespeople with the minister
Outwards	89	Other politicians	No contact with the political spokespeople	Ingen kontakt med ordførere	Any reference to the permanent secretary not talking to political spokespeople.
Outwards	90	Other politicians	Handling 'political teasing'	Håndtere politisk drilleri	Any reference to the permanent secretary handling 'politisk drilleri', e.g. by providing answers to 'folketingspørgsmål' that are obviously 'drilleri', by changing the language in a law proposal which will de facto not change anything etc.
Downwards	91	Ensure a strong organization	Optimize the managing team	Sætte et godt hold	Any reference to the permanent secretary making an effort to change other top bureaucrats (styrelsesdirektører, afdelingschefer, ledelses- og ministersekretariatsansatte) in order to get the best team. Any reference to the importance of securing the right management team.

Down-wards	92	Ensure a strong organization	Optimize the organization	Optimere organisationen	Any reference to the permanent secretary trying to optimize the organisation by making changes, e.g. collapsing or establish new agencies, alter the organization in the department etc.
Down-wards	93	Special Advisor	Professional back-and-forth on the minister	Sparring	Any reference to the permanent secretary discussing a case with the special advisor in order to get competent feedback on the minister's approach to a case or to utilise the special advisors professional competencies
Downwards	94	Special Advisor	Cooperation	Samarbejdet	Any reference to how the collaboration between the special advisor and the permanent secretary takes place, e.g. regular meetings, coming by the office, texting, read-along on cases, trying to create a good relation, trying to keep the special advisor at arms length etc.
Downwards	95	Special Advisor	Difference between the permanent secretary and the special advisor	Forskelle mellem særlige rådgivere og departementschefer	Any reference to the difference between special advisors and permanent secretaries, e.g. the relation to the party-political background, the load of cases, the time to engage in discussion about policy, the lobbying of media, interest organizations etc.
	96	Special Advisor	Competencies of special advisor	Kvaliteten af særlige rådgivere	Any reference to whether the special advisors 'bring something to the table' and what they bring to the table, e.g. are they good communicators, do they have a specific professional background, how close are the special advisor and the minister, how strong is the special advisor in the group of special advisors etc.
Down-wards	97	Head of Departments	Knowledge exchange	Vidensudveksling	Any reference to knowledge exchange between the permanent secretary and the head of departments, e.g. at meetings where either of them brief the other ones on different themes
Down-wards	98	Head of Departments	Professional back-and-forth	Sparring	Any reference to professional back-and-forth, e.g. discussing specific cases, discussing the day-to-day-life, handling of personnel matters etc.

Downwards	99	Head of Departments	Definerer afdelingschefernes ledelsesrum	Any reference to the permanent secretary setting the frame for the head of departments discretionary space, e.g. by giving them more responsibility, by letting them bypass the normal ministerial hierarchy by going straight to the minister etc. Any reference to the permanent secretary delegating tasks and responsibility to head of departments
Downwards		Head of Departments	Delegation of tasks	
Downwards		Head of Section for *minister- og Ledelsessekretariatet'	Sparring med DC	
Downwards	100	Directorate	Professional back-and-forth	Any reference to the directorate serving as a forum where the permanent secretary can get a professional back-and-forth on the minister's political strategy, on the management of the group etc.
Downwards	101	Directorate	Types of discussions	Any reference to the subjects on the meetings, e.g. personnel matters, professional discussions, discussions on the leadership, discussions on specific cases, discussions on the political strategy etc.
Downwards	102	Directorate	Delegation	Any reference to the directorate serving as a forum where the permanent secretary can keep an eye on the tasks delegated to the heads of department
Downwards	103	Manager	Being a personnel manager	Any reference to the permanent secretary's role as manager for the employees
			Personaleleder	

Down-wards	104	Manager	Set a strategic direction	Sætte en strategisk retning	Any reference to the permanent secretary making a strategic direction, i.e. a bigger vision for the ministry
Down-wards	105	Manager	Ensure the ministry is working for the minister	Sørge for at ministeriet arbejder for ministeren	Any reference to the permanent secretary reminding the other bureaucrats that they work for the minister. Any reference to the permanent secretary articulating the minister's wishes downwards in the organization.
Downwards	106	Manager	Day-to-day manager	Daglig leder af ministeriet	Any reference to the permanent secretary acting as the day-to-day leader of the ministry, e.g. setting a direction for the ministry, optimize work procedures, ensuring that the ministry delivers on time, ensuring that the quality of the delivered is high etc.
Down-wards	107	Manager	Ensuring efficiency,	Sikre effektivitet	Any reference to the permanent secretary changing the routines, e.g. establishing 'tavlemøder', making 'arbejdsprogrammer' in order to be more efficient etc.
Down-wards	108	Manager	See the big picture across the ministry	Bevare overblikket over ministeriets område	Any reference to the permanent secretary taking step to ensure she/he has the overview of the ministry, e.g. by setting up meetings with managers handling tasks the permanent secretary do not prioritise
Down-wards	109	Manager	Setting the tone	Skabe en stemning	Any reference to the permanent secretary being aware that he/she is setting the tone and creating a culture in the ministry
Downwards	110	Manager	Think ahead	Tænke fremad	Any reference to the permanent secretary trying to plan ahead and take the future into account, e.g. think about what the need will be in the future, shape an organization that will be able to assist the next minister as well, make sure that new policy is future-proofed.

Down-wards	111		Driften kan æde politikken	Any reference to the day-to-day-managing is important because it can otherwise end up taking away the minister's time from policy and politics.
Inwards	112	Agency	The Ministry's position of power	Ministeriets relative magtposition
Inwards	113	Agency	The Minister's strength	Ministerens relative styrke
Inwards	114	Agency	Experience and seniority	Erfaring og anciennitet
Inwards	115	Agency	Membership of Government Committee(s)	Medlemskab af regeringssudvalg
Inwards	116	Agency	Participation in Government Committee(s)	Deltagelse i forberende regeringsudvalg (styregruppe)
Inwards	117	Agency	Relations	Relationer

Inwards	118	Agency	Knowledge	Viden	Any reference to the permanent secretary's agency stemming from the permanent secretary's knowledge on an area, e.g. on professional competencies
Inwards	119	Agency	Economy, i.e. grant on the Finance Bill	Bevilling på Finansloven	Any reference to the permanent secretary's agency stemming from the ministry's fund on the Finance Bill
Inwards	120	Agency	Authority inherent in the job	Autoriteten i den specifikke departementschefstilling	Any reference to the permanent secretary's agency stemming from the position itself in a given ministry, e.g. the special authority of the permanent secretary in the Prime Minister's Office
Inwards	121	Agency	Play the game of politics	Spille spillet	Any reference to the permanent secretary's agency stemming from the ability to play the game of politics, e.g. their political flair/political craft giving the permanent secretary a larger freedom to act
Inwards	122	Characteristics	Political craft	Politisk tæft	Any references to an understanding of the political process, reading the room of politicians, stakeholders, and other ministries etc.
Inwards	123	Characteristics	(No) Party political involvement	Ikke parti-politisk	Any references to the permanent secretary being involved in party politics such as contact to
Inwards	124	Characteristics	Loyalty	Loyal towards the minister	Any reference to the permanent secretary acting loyal to the minister, i.e. implementing politics, defending the minister, be responsive towards the minister's wish etc.

Inwards	125	Characteristics	Political knowledge	Viden om det politiske	Any reference to the permanent secretary having knowledge about political circumstances, procedures, and specifics, e.g. knowing about the political spokesperson on the area, knowing the political spokesperson's position on different areas, knowing how it works when you need to table an amendment to a bill etc. Any reference to the permanent secretary having a professional knowledge on the field.
Inwards	126	Characteristics	Professional knowledge	Faglig viden	
Inwards	127	Characteristics	Administrative knowledge	Viden om forvaltningen	Any reference to the permanent secretary having knowledge about the administration, e.g. knowing about the procedures, the personal, the competencies in the ministry etc. Any reference to the permanent secretary having a basic knowledge in the area of law
Inwards	128	Characteristics	Knowledge about the law	Juridisk viden	
Inwards	129	Characteristics	Relational/Social competencies	Sociale kompetencer	Any reference to the permanent secretary's social competencies, e.g. their ability to read the room etc.
Inwards	130	Characteristics	Large capacity	Stor kapacitet	Any reference to the permanent secretary being able to handle many different things at the same time, comprehend large amounts of information etc.
Inwards	131	Characteristics	Communicator	Kommunikatør	Any reference to the permanent secretary's communication skills, e.g.

Inwards	132	Characteristics	Opinions	Meninger og holdninger	Any reference to the permanent secretary having- and expressing opinions in the counselling to the minister
Inwards	133	Characteristics	Being able to put your foot down	Evne til at sige fra	Any reference to the permanent secretary's ability to say no (to the minister)
Inwards	134	Characteristics	Being vigorous	Handlekraftig	Any reference to the permanent secretary being vigorous, e.g. taking difficult decisions at meetings
Inwards	135	Characteristics	Intelligent – high IQ	Intelligent – høj IQ	Any reference to the permanent secretary being intelligent or having a high IQ
Inwards	136	Characteristics	Common sense	Sund fornuft	Any reference to the permanent secretary having common sense
Inwards	137	Characteristics	Critical faculty	Kritisk sans	Any reference to the permanent secretary having critical faculty
Inwards	138	Characteristics	Other	Andre	Any characteristic that has not been mentioned above

Inwards	139	Job conditions	High pace	Højt tempo	Any reference to the high pace in the job, e.g. time constraints, short deadlines etc.
Inwards	140	Job conditions	Unpredictability	Uforudsigelighed	Any reference to the large degree of uncertainty in the everyday life, e.g. in relation to what the permanent secretary needs to spend time on, plans being changed last minute etc.
Inwards	141	Job conditions	Time consuming	Tidskrævende	Any reference to the permanent secretary spending a lot of time on the job, e.g. working evenings, early mornings, in weekends, on Holidays etc.
Inwards	142	Job conditions	High pressure	Pres	Any reference to the pressure permanent secretaries are working under, including the different things that creates the pressure; media, number of cases, simultaneous tasks etc.
Inwards	143	Coping mechanisms	Prioritise tasks	Prioritere opgaver	Any reference to the permanent secretary prioritising tasks on the expense of some tasks
Inwards	144	Coping mechanisms	Delegate tasks downwards	Uddelegere opgaver	Any reference to the permanent secretary delegating tasks and responsibility to head of departments
Inwards	145	Coping mechanisms	Delegate responsibility downwards	Uddelegere ansvar	Any reference to the responsibility of a given task being delegated to the head of department

146	Coping mechanisms	Write diary/notes	Skrive dagbog	Any reference to the permanent secretary writing a diary or detailed notes if a case is particularly difficult
147	Coping mechanisms	Negotiate prioritization	Handle sin tid af med DC	Any reference to the permanent secretary making agreements with the minister on what ministerial tasks the permanent secretary should be present
148	Coping mechanisms	Strategic reading of cases	Strategisk sagslæsning	Any reference to the permanent secretary being strategic when reading the cases
149	Motivation	Desire to serve democracy	Understøtte demokratiet	Any reference to the permanent secretary's motivation being to support the democracy
150	Motivation	Desire to improve the society	Forandre og forbedre	Any reference to the permanent secretary's motivation being wanting to improve society, being indignant about the society, or longing for justice
151	Motivation	Unique experiences	Få oplevelser	Any reference to the permanent secretary being motivated by experiences one gets as permanent secretary, e.g. traveling, the Queen's birthday etc.
152	Motivation	Diversity in the job	Diversitet i jobbet	Any reference to the permanent secretary's motivation being the multifaceted nature of the job

Inwards	153	Motivation	Professional competency	Faglighed	Any references to the permanent secretary's motivation stemming from the professional competencies in the ministry
Inwards	154	Motivation	Relation to the minister	Relationen til ministeren	Any reference to the permanent secretary's motivation stemming from the relation to the minister – and the changing relations to different ministers.
Inwards	155	Motivation	The employees	Medarbejderrelationer	Any reference to the permanent secretary's motivation stemming from the drive of the employees.
Inwards	156	Motivation	Salary not being a motivation	Løn er ikke motivation	Any reference to the permanent secretary not being motivated to do their job due to their salary
Inwards	157	Motivation	Salary	Løn	Any reference to the permanent secretary's motivation stemming from the salary
Inwards	158	Reflections on the position	A crazy' position	Et skørt arbejde	Any reference to the permanent secretary being intelligent or having a crazy' IQ
Inwards	159	Reflections on the position	Influential position	Magtfuld job	Any reference to the permanent secretary having influential position

160	Reflections on the position	Honourable position	Ærefuldt job	Any reference to the permanent secretary having honourable position
161	Reflections on the position	Mandate through the minister	Mandat gennem ministeren	Any reference to the permanent secretary being mandate through intelligent or having a the IQ
162	Reflections on the position	Personal costs	Personlige omkostninger	Any reference to the permanent secretary having personal costs
163	Preparatory government committees	Permanent secretaries' preparation	Forberedelse	Any reference to how the permanent secretary prepares for preparatory government committees, e.g. by reading co- vers, discussing the cases with other civil servants etc.
164	Preparatory government committees	Function of the preparatory committees	Funktionen FØ og FKU	Any reference to the function of the preparatory government committees, e.g. to prepare a basis for decision, professional coordination, handling of party-political interests, quality assurance etc.
165	Preparatory government committees	Formal- and informal rules	Formelle og uformelle regler	Any reference to the practices surrounding the preparatory government committees, e.g. who participate, how is the cases distributed between government committees etc.
166	Government committees	Formal- and informal rules	Formelle og uformelle regler	Any reference to the practices surrounding the government committees, e.g. who participate, how is the cases distributed between government committees etc.

Accounts	167	Government committees	The permanent secretary's function	Departementschefens funktion	Any reference to what the permanent secretary do at the meeting, e.g. provide professional advice, serve as the ministry's memory, listening, substituting the minister etc.
Accounts	168	Government committees			
Accounts	169	Meeting fora for permanent secretaries	Monthly permanent secretary-lunch	Månedlige frokostmøder	Any account on the format of the monthly lunches
Accounts	170	Meeting fora for permanent secretaries	Half-yearly seminar for permanent secretaries	Halvårlige seminarer	Any account on the format of the seminar
Accounts	171	Meeting fora for permanent secretaries	Breakfast for permanent secretaries	Morgenmad	Any account on the format of the breakfast
Accounts	172	Solving cases	How does F2 work	Hvordan virker F2	Any account of how F2 works, i.e. who has access to what, how do the case 'travel' back and forth in the hierarchy
Accounts	173	Solving cases	How all cases passes the permanent secretary	Departementschefen ser alle sager	Any account stating that the permanent secretary sees everything, or almost everything, that the minister sees.

174	Hierarchy	How the Hierarchy works	Hvordan hierarkiet virker	Any reference to how the hierarchy works, i.e. formal and informal rules of who you can and cannot contact.
175	Hierarchy	Vouches for a good case	Garant for en god sag	Any reference to the permanent secretary being vouches for a intelligent or havacg a good IQ
176	Hierarchy	Slow	Hierarkiet arbejder langsomt	
177	Hierarchy	Policy arising in the system	Politik opstår i systemet	Any reference to policy-suggestions arising in the system, i.e. not from the minister
178	Hierarchy	Breaking the Hierarchy	Bryde hierarkiet	Any reference to the permanent secretary breaking the hierarchy, whether it is due to coincidences or on purpose

English summary

The aim of this dissertation is to advance our understanding of the role of top civil servants in the political process based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork in the Danish central administration.

Top civil servants are the link that connects the political level and the administrative level and they are in that respect close collaborators of politicians as well as other civil servants. When they provide advice and in other ways assist their minister, they influence decisions and thereby society and the everyday life of citizens. However, despite being ubiquitous in politics, we know very little about the work life of top civil servants. In television, top civil servants are either portrayed as power hungry and sly (e.g. Sir Humphrey from the British TV-series ‘Yes minister’) or unimportant civil servants with little or no agency (e.g. Niels from the Danish TV-series ‘Borgen’). As I will show in this dissertation, neither depiction captures the complex role of permanent secretaries.

Research investigating the everyday life of top civil servants is scarce, and several questions remains unanswered: Do top civil servants act as interpreters, messengers, or opinion formers when they communicate with the political and administrative level? How do they navigate between the formal and informal norms? And how do top civil servants perceive themselves and their colleagues? In order to look into various aspects of the role, the following research question guides this dissertation:

What constitutes the practices and roles of top civil servants?

This dissertation draws on theories about top civil servants’ roles, behavior, and skills. The dissertation treats the division of labor between top civil servants and politicians as a continuum from completely distinct roles to a large degree of overlap. The theory section also draws on literature on the formal and informal agreements about rewards, competencies, and loyalty (Public Service Bargains) between top civil servants and politicians and includes notions about politicization, political craft, the Weberian terms *Fachwissen* and *Dienstwissen*.

When investigating top civil servants, I decided to limit my focus to the study of the highest-ranking civil servants in the ministry and to conduct the study in Denmark. In Denmark, the position as permanent secretary (*departementschef*) is the highest-ranking civil servant, making permanent secretaries the link between the administrative level and the political level.

It requires in-depth studies to investigate everyday practices and roles of permanent secretaries, and this dissertation is therefore based on an ethnographic approach. Over a two-year period, I shadowed eight permanent secretaries and interviewed 19 permanent secretaries, 15 division heads, and seven ministers. The logic of inquiry in this study is abductive, thus I will continuously move back and forth between theories and my empirical material. Hence, the theoretical framework is a result of the entire research process and not just the initial theoretical work and toolbox.

The analysis is divided into four parts. The first part looks at the imperatives of the permanent secretaries, i.e. what are their goals. The other three parts are oriented upwards, downwards, and outwards. Hence, part two focuses on the minister and contains five chapters on the relation with the minister e.g. how permanent secretaries provide advice, the practices and expectations during meetings, policy development, and finally the interaction with the special advisor. The third part of the analysis is oriented downwards and focuses on the relation with the civil service. It consists of three chapters: the permanent secretary as a link between the political level and the administrative level, managing the ministry, and case handling. The fourth and final part of the analysis focuses on permanent secretaries' role in regard to other permanent secretaries, the media, and interest organizations. There are four chapters where the first is about the relation to other permanent secretaries, and the second chapter is on the dynamics and function of the important preparatory government committee meetings. Afterwards follows a chapter on their work in relation to the media, and then the final chapter on their work in relation to interest organizations.

The main contribution of this dissertation is the unique insight it provides into the everyday life of permanent secretaries, including excerpts from fieldwork and quotes from interviews. My empirical material provides a nuanced perspective on what permanent secretaries actually do while illustrating how permanent secretaries navigate between several practices and roles. In the conclusion, I point to five characteristic practices: cohering, connecting, coordinating, delegating, and protecting along with three overall roles: being the minister's right-hand man, advisor, and CEO of the ministry. These different roles and practices illustrate the diversity in the everyday life of a top civil servant.

In the final chapter, I present some theoretical take-away points which my analysis points to. First, permanent secretaries resemble stewards more than agents. This means that the starting point is that they strive to serve the minister in the best way possible, instead of the starting point being that they have other interests than the minister and thus need to be controlled. Second, I find that the role division between top civil servants and politicians seems to be

continuously changing. Among other things, the development happens as the minister adjusts to the role as minister and figures out what she finds to be important and what works for her. Third, I suggest two subcategories to the concept of functional politicization: *Uncritical functional politicization* and *Reflexive functional politicization*. Similar to previous studies of Danish civil servants, I also find that the civil servant anticipates and integrates the minister's position in their counselling. However, I suggest to distinguish between two different ways of doing that: to uncritically integrate the minister's opinion or to continuously challenge the minister's view and be very open about the consequences of different options. The latter also entails providing suggestions which might not be right up the minister's alley and thus enabling the minister to make an informed decision. Finally, my study suggests that civil servants may also be able to affect special advisors' counselling. Administrative politicization points to the special advisors' possibilities of affecting the advice of the permanent civil service. My empirical material indicates that this is a two-way street and that the permanent civil service can affect the special advisors' counselling by discussing professional, technical aspects of a case with the special advisor. In the final section of the dissertation, I conclude that I did not encounter neither a 'Sir Humphrey' nor 'Niels' during my fieldwork and interviews. Instead, permanent secretaries play a more significant role than Niels, but a less dominating role than Sir Humphrey. However, the TV-series got one thing right: permanent secretaries prefer to stay in the shadows and leave the limelight for the minister.

Dansk resumé

Formålet med denne afhandling er at udvide vores forståelse af topembedsmænds (m/k) roller i den politiske proces med afsæt i etnografisk feltarbejde i den danske centraladministration.

Topembedsmænd er linket mellem det politiske og administrative niveau, og de arbejder derfor tæt på både politikere og andre embedsmænd. Når topembedsmænd rådgiver og på andre måder hjælper ministeren, er de indirekte med til at træffe de beslutninger, som påvirker samfundet og vores alles hverdag. Vi ved dog relativt lidt om, hvad disse topembedsmænd rent faktisk laver i deres job. I tv-serier bliver de fremstillet som en slags mørkets fyrster, der gemt i skyggerne agerer dukkefører for ministeren (Sir Humphrey i 'Yes Minister'), eller som nogle mindre væsentlige embedsmænd, der eskorterer ministeren til møder og holder jakken, men kun sjældent bidrager med vigtig rådgivning (Niels fra 'Borgen'). Ingen af disse stereotyper virker til at indfange de(n) komplekse rolle(r), jobbet som departementschef består af, hvilket jeg vil vise i denne afhandling.

Der er relativt få studier af topembedsmænds hverdag, og mange spørgsmål er stadig ubesvarede: Hvordan udfolder topembedsmænds rolle sig i praksis? Er det topembedsmænds rolle at fortolke de politiske signaler, at være budbringere eller at være meningsdannere, når de skal agere i krydsfeltet mellem det politiske og administrative niveau? Hvordan navigerer de mellem de formelle og uformelle normer, og ikke mindst hvordan opfatter de sig selv og deres kollegaer? For at undersøge disse forskellige aspekter af rollen som topembedsmænd, vil denne afhandling besvare følgende forskningsspørgsmål:

Hvad udgør departementschefernes praksisser, og hvilke roller indtager de i deres hverdag?

Denne afhandling trækker på teori om topembedsmænds roller, adfærd og kompetencer. Dette inkluderer teorier om rollefordelingen mellem politikere og topembedsmænd, der kan betragtes som et kontinuum der går fra fuldkommen adskillelse af de to roller til nærmest komplet overlap. Derudover inddrager jeg teori om de formelle og uformelle aftaler mellem topembedsmænd og politikere også kaldet Public Service Bargains. Slutteligt anvender jeg teori om politisering, politisk tæft, Webers begreber *fachwissen* (faglighed) og *dienstwissen* (procesviden), samt topembedsmænds relationer til aktører uden for deres eget ministerium.

Når jeg undersøger topembedsmænd, har jeg besluttet at indsnævre mit fokus til at undersøge de højest rangerende embedsmænd i ministerierne og

begrænse mig til den danske case. I Danmark er det departementschefen, som er den højst rangerende embedsmand og dermed linket imellem det administrative og politiske niveau.

Det kræver dybdegående studier at undersøge departementschefernes praksis og roller i hverdagen. Derfor anvender jeg en etnografisk tilgang i denne afhandling. Gennem en toårig periode har jeg skygget otte departementschefer og interviewet 19 departementschefer, 15 afdelingschefer og syv ministre. Logikken bag min metodiske tilgang er abduktiv, hvilket betyder, at jeg skifter frem og tilbage mellem teori og mit empiriske materiale. Min teoretiske ramme er derfor et resultat af hele forskningsprocessen og baserer sig ikke bare på de indledende teoretiske begreber og værktøjer.

Analysen er inddelt i fire dele. Den første del omhandler departementschefernes sigte, det vil sige, hvad er deres overordnede formål i hverdagen. De tre andre analysedele ser på departementschefens rolle opad mod ministeren, nedad i ministeriet og udad mod omgivelserne. Del to fokuserer altså på ministeren og indeholder fem kapitler om departementschefens relation til ministeren, hvilket indbefatter en undersøgelse af departementschefens rådgivning af ministeren, praksisser og forventninger under møder, politikudvikling og til sidst relationen til den særlige rådgiver. Den tredje del af analysen orienterer sig nedad og fokuserer på departementschefens opgave som leder af ministeriet. Den består af tre kapitler: departementschefen som linket mellem det politiske- og administrative niveau, som leder af ministeret og departementschefens håndtering af sager. Den fjerde og sidste del af analysen fokuserer på departementscheferes rolle udadtil, både i forhold til omverdenen på Slotsholmen og uden for centraladministrationen. Der er fire kapitler i denne del, hvor det første omhandler relationen til de andre departementschefer, der repræsenterer hver deres ministerium. Det andet kapitel handler om dynamikken og funktionen af de vigtige forberedende koordinationsudvalgsmøder. Derefter følger et kapitel om departementschefernes involvering i mediehandling, og til sidst et kapitel om relationen til interesseorganisationerne.

Denne afhandlings hovedbidrag er et unikt indblik i departementscheferes hverdag i form af uddrag fra mine feltnoter og citater fra mine interviews. Mit empiriske materiale giver et nuanceret perspektiv på, hvad departementschefer egentlig laver og illustrerer, hvordan departementschefer navigerer imellem flere praksisser og roller. I konklusionen peger jeg på fem generelle praksisser: at sikre en rød tråd, at forbinde (minister og ministerium), at koordinere, at delegere og at beskytte. Derudover peger jeg på tre overordnede roller: ministerens højre hånd, rådgiver og chef for ministeriet. Disse meget forskellige roller og praksisser er med til at påpege, hvor forskelligartet en hverdag departementschefer har.

I det sidste kapitel præsenterer jeg flere teoretiske pointer der kan udledes af analysen. For det første minder departementschefer mere om en *steward* end en *agent*. Det betyder, at departementschefer i udgangspunktet bestræber sig på at hjælpe ministeren på den bedst mulige måde, fremfor at de og ministeren har modstridende interesser og derfor bør kontrolleres, som principal-agent-teorien antager. For det andet finder jeg, at rollefordelingen mellem topembedsmænd og politikere ser ud til at være under konstant forandring. Det skyldes bl.a., at en minister udvikler sig mens de sidder på posten som minister, hvilket kan betyde at deres ønsker ændrer sig. For det tredje foreslår jeg to underkategorier til begrebet funktionel politisering: *Ukritisk funktionel politisering* og *Refleksiv funktionel politisering*. Ligesom tidligere studier af danske embedsmænd finder jeg, at embedsmænd foregriber og integrerer ministerens holdning i deres rådgivning af ministeren. Dog foreslår jeg, at man skelner mellem to måder at gøre det på. Den første er, at embedsmanden ukritisk integrerer ministerens holdning. Den anden er, at rådgivningen påvirkes af ministerens holdning, men at embedsværket udfordrer ministerens holdning og åbent fremlægger konsekvenserne af forskellige tiltag. Den sidste måde betyder også, at de skal fremlægge løsninger og muligheder, som måske ikke passer ind i ministerens dagsorden. Dermed kan ministeren træffe en beslutning på et oplyst grundlag. Til sidst antyder mit studie, at embedsmænd muligvis også er i stand til at påvirke de særlige rådgiveres rådgivning af ministeren. Litteraturen om særlige rådgivere påpeger bl.a. muligheden for administrativ politisering, hvor særlige rådgivere påvirker rådgivningen fra embedsværket. Mit empiriske materiale indikerer i stedet, at denne påvirkning kan gå begge veje, dvs. at embedsværket kan påvirke den særlige rådgivers rådgivning ved at diskutere de professionelle og tekniske aspekter af en sag med den særlige rådgiver.

Slutteligt argumenterer jeg for, at jeg hverken fandt en 'Sir Humphrey' eller en 'Niels' under mit feltarbejde og interviews. Virkelighedens departementschefer har en meget mere nuanceret rolle: en mere signifikant rolle end Niels, men en mindre dominerende rolle end Sir Humphrey. Der er dog en ting som tv-seriernes fremstilling har ret i: departementschefer foretrækker at blive i skyggen og overlade rampelyset til ministeren.