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The lure of power: Career paths and considerations among policy professionals in Sweden

This paper analyses career paths and career considerations among policy professionals in Sweden. It builds on a longitudinal data set in which the professionals' careers are mapped and interviews conducted over a six-year period. We found that (a) skills such as the ability to navigate the political system make policy professionals employable in a variety of organizations; (b) considerations regarding different aspects of power were central to their career decisions; and (c) the barriers in their labour market are related to ideological commitments, loyalties, and value hierarchies that make policy professionals reluctant to move anywhere their skills could take them.

Keywords: policy professionals; political advisors; Sweden; power; careers; motivations; skills; field

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In this paper, we analyse career paths and career considerations among a particular group of political actors that we call *policy professionals* (Garsten, Rothstein, and Svallfors 2015, Heclo 1978, Svallfors 2017a). These political actors are *employed* by various organizations to do advocacy, craft policy, and give political advice. They constitute a heterogeneous set of actors, including political advisors in government offices, political support staff in parties, think-tankers, interest organization experts, and political consultants of various stripes. What makes this category of political actors different from politicians is that they are not elected to office but hired (on a short- or long-term basis) to influence policy and politics. In contrast to civil servants and other public administrators, they are hired on a partisan basis to promote certain values and interests over others.

Democratic governance now includes many political actors who are professional employees rather than elected politicians, something that is often viewed with some apprehension since it raises concerns about accountability and legitimacy (Dahl 1989, Ch. 23, Mancini 1999, Manin 1997). In this paper, we focus on a particular aspect of this professionalization by analysing the emerging labour market for policy professionals. We use this as a window to look into policy professionals' more general modus operandi, and ultimately their role in democratic governance. This analysis zeroes in on their skills, which put them in demand, and their motivations, which shape their choices of destinations. Skills and motivation are inherently intertwined – it is difficult to make sense of one without considering the other – and this paper examines both in order to understand the dynamics of this labour market.

With these starting points, we intend to answer the following empirical questions:

1. What special skills and particular motivations drive the careers of policy professionals, or more specifically their desires and opportunities to remain in their positions, to move to other positions in the policy professional field, or to exit from this field?

2. Are there specific barriers or hurdles in the policy professional labour market, and if so, what do they consist of?

To explore these issues, we use a unique longitudinal data set in which policy professionals' careers are mapped over a six-year period (2012–2018), and a number of them are interviewed both in 2012/13 and in 2018. The setting is Sweden, a historically strong corporatist system, where social partnership used to be the order of the day. Recently, this political landscape has been swiftly transformed in the direction of a more decentralized, quasi-pluralist and network-based mode of interest articulation and political advocacy (Lindvall and Rothstein 2006, Lindvall and Sebring 2005, Svallfors 2016b). In this

transformed institutional setting, the role of various policy professionals has become more accentuated, and their numbers have increased substantially, both inside and outside government (Garsten, Rothstein, and Svallfors 2015).

The appearance of non-elected political actors in Sweden is not a recent phenomenon. Still, over the last three decades, the number of policy professionals has increased dramatically. For example, the number of political appointees in government has gone from 24 in 1975, to 109 in 1995, to over 200 today (Dahlström 2009, Regeringskansliet 2018), and in parliament the ratio of political secretaries to MPs has gone from roughly 1/10 in the early 1980s to roughly 1/1 today (authors' own computations based on parliamentary statistics). At the same time, there has been an explosion of firms that provide political expertise to private business and organized interests. In the 1970s, there were only two such firms. Today, this is an industry with around 1500 employees (Tyllström 2013), several hundred of which work primarily as contract lobbyists. Think tanks have also become a common feature of the Swedish political landscape. The total number of policy professional positions in Sweden is somewhere between 2000 and 3500, depending on how wide the net is cast (Garsten, Rothstein, and Svallfors 2015, Ch. 2).

The rise of various professional non-elected political actors has received increasing research attention. However, most of this research focuses on the role of professionals in specific organizations. Research has, for example, studied the role of think-tankers in spanning the boundaries between research and politics (Medvetz 2012b, Rich 2004, Stone 1996), the relations in government offices between political advisors and elected politicians and/or civil servants (Blick and Jones 2013, Connaughton 2010, 2015, Craft 2016, Eichbaum and Shaw 2010, Yong and Hazell 2014), the influence of experts (including campaign specialists) in politics and policy making (Campbell and Pedersen 2011, Christensen 2017, Esterling 2004, Lindvall 2009) (Plasser and Plasser 2002), and the activities of lobbyists and communication advisors (Baumgartner et al. 2009, Tyllström 2013).

A stream of research has taken a broader view of policy professionals (in the previous literature sometimes conceptualized as "policy entrepreneurs" or "policy specialists") and their activities (Dahl 1989, Ch. 23, Garsten, Rothstein, and Svallfors 2015, Heclo 1978, Kingdon 2011 [1984], Ch. 3,8, Svallfors 2017a). In this literature, there are findings concerning the skills and resources of policy professionals (such as access to relevant networks and the possession of expert political knowledge), the motivations in their line of work (often related to the exercise of political power), and the ambiguity of their roles in relation to politicians, civil servants, and organizational leaders. However, largely missing from these previous studies are systematic analyses of these professionals' careers and trajectories across organizations. In the face of a broad professionali-

zation of virtually all domains of politics and the emergence of a labour market for political expertise, such a perspective is needed, and it is the aim of this paper to provide one.

Regarding policy professional careers, previous literature has mainly paid attention to the "revolving door" between government/parliament and lobbying (Blanes i Vidal, Draca, and Fons-Rosen 2012, Parker 2009, Parker, Parker, and Dabros 2012, Tyllström 2019). In this literature, "revolvers" are mainly seen as driven by financial considerations. Politics is the arena where certain skills and valuable contacts are acquired. These skills and networks can then be sold and transformed into economic gains. But since networks expire and skills depreciate, "revolvers" need repeated stints in politics to retain their market value. Consequently, they come across as quite similar to other temporarily hired skilled professionals who rotate into and out of various organizations and in doing so accumulate marketable experience (Barley and Kunda 2004).

However, the policy professional labour market includes many other transitions and trajectories besides the "revolving door". It is our intention with this paper to map and illuminate how this broader labour market works in order to show what constitutes policy professionalism as a field – a field that spans various organizations and organizational types.

The rest of the paper is structured in the following way. In the next section, we outline some theoretical starting points for the analysis centred on the concepts of field and skills. The third section presents the longitudinal data set and the associated methodological considerations. The first empirical section maps origins and destinations among different Swedish policy professionals from 2012 to 2018. The next two sections build on the interviews and deal with motivations, skills, and career barriers. The concluding section summarizes the results and discusses some implications for democratic governance.

Fields, skills, and motivations

In this paper, we uncover and describe policy professionalism as a *field*. This entails conceptualizing policy professionals as a heterogeneous *boundary-spanning* category, invested with certain *political skills*, and driven by particular *motivations*. How do we understand these concepts?

Policy professionals inhabit a field. A field may be defined as a meso-level social order in which actors interact on the basis of shared understandings about the purposes of the field and their actions within it, about what relations exist to other actors in the field, and about the rules that govern legitimate action in the field (Fligstein and McAdam 2012, 9) (Cf. Barley 2010). As for policy professionals, their field is constituted by the purpose of changing society by political

means; it contains multiple relations – to other policy professionals, politicians, and other political actors – and it is governed by a set of explicit and implicit rules (such as acting under the conditions of democratic governance).

Their field is related to other adjacent fields, such as journalism/media, profit-seeking enterprise, and public administration. In relation to these adjacent fields, and in the internal relations among organizations in their field, policy professionals appear as a boundary-spanning category (Medvetz 2010, 2012a). Their activities, networks, and careers span organizational boundaries both within and outside their field. It is therefore imperative to take an approach that does not remain confined to particular organizations or organizational types when trying to understand policy professionals as a category of actors. Their generic skills and motivations, which can be applied in diverse organizational settings, will only become visible when we apply a broad cross-organizational perspective, that is, a perspective that is not restricted to a particular type of organization.

These political skills could be defined as the ability to competently navigate the political system (as broadly conceived) to achieve the desired political results. Previous research has indicated that the three most pertinent aspects of these political skills are: *framing problems* (using research and other sources in order to frame social and political problems in advantageous ways), *knowing the game* (having first-hand knowledge of how the political decision-making machinery works at various levels and in different respects), and *accessing information* (knowing whom to contact for fast and reliable information) (Svallfors 2017a). The exact composition of these three skill areas varies among positions and individuals, but they are all necessary ingredients for a successful policy professional action repertoire.

Regarding motivations we take our contrasting starting-point in the literature on "public service motivations", that highlight the specific motivations and value orientations among public sector employees (for summaries, see Perry, Hondeghem, and Wise 2010, Perry and Vandenabeele 2015). In this literature, it is found that public administrators are characterized by a strong commitment to the public interest and express loyalty to duty and the government as a system. Commitment to social equity and to specific public programs also figure prominently. In all, public spirit and public interest seem to drive commitments among public administrators.

We add to this literature by asking to what extent the motivations of policy professionals differ from those of public administrators. As will become obvious, our case offers a contrasting view of motivations in politics and policy making, since the motivations among policy professionals are of a quite different kind from those of public administrators and civil servants. The appeal of political

power, in its various guises, is fundamental in providing the most important motivation behind their work and their career motivations.

It is important to realize that skills and their application are inherently intertwined with the motivations of individual actors. It would be meaningless to speak of particular skills without taking into account the overarching purpose(s) they serve. Hence, the analysis in this paper revolves around the motivations that drive career decisions and that constitute a fundamental part of what it means to be a policy professional and, by extension, what their role is in democratic governance.

Data and methods

Data on Swedish policy professionals were collected between 2012 and 2018. Six types of organizations constitute the policy professional field: (1) Government offices; (2) Parliamentary parties; (3) Trade unions; (4) Other major interest organizations; (5) Think tanks; (6) PR firms. A comprehensive mapping of these organizations, in 2012, gave a total of 913 individuals occupying positions that were non-elected and yet both partisan and policy relevant.[1] The median age in the population of policy professionals is 39 and 45 percent are women (Garsten, Rothstein, and Svallfors 2015).

Between 2012 and 2013, a total of 71 policy professionals, selected on the basis of position, gender, age, and political party affiliation, were interviewed. We used a semi-structured interview format covering key aspects of their work and careers. A subsample of the interviewees from this first round were re-interviewed in 2018 (N=32).[2] These interviews were again semi-structured, but this time the focus was on the interviewees' careers since 2012 and their considerations in this regard. The selection of re-interviewees was strategic in order to cover those who had *remained* in the same job since 2012, those who had *moved* to other policy professional positions in the field, and those who had *exited* from the policy professional field.

All interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and coded for pertinent themes. The thematic analysis followed an abductive format, in which sets of categories derived from the main research questions were subsequently revised in a stepwise fashion through confrontation with salient interview quotes and through input from research project members. The original categories were thus amended, collapsed, or split, and new categories were introduced to cover pertinent interview themes. The final result of this exercise for the 2018 interviews is a 48-page thematic excerpt document (in Swedish, available from the authors), from which all quotes in this paper have been selected and translated.

Apart from conducting interviews, we also quantitatively mapped the work trajectories of the 913 policy professionals between 2012 and 2018, resulting in 788 complete career descriptions (most of the missing data can be attributed to retirements). All positions were recorded using a coding scheme that included organization and job title. This information was collected primarily through the websites of the organizations and LinkedIn profiles. Where needed, other web sources were used. Our first empirical section builds on this mapping.[3]

Trajectories in the field

How have the careers of Swedish policy professionals evolved over the six-year period from 2012 to 2018? Table 1 displays this for each organizational type. To simplify, the table only includes positions in 2012 and 2018, while any intermediary career steps are disregarded.

As shown in table 1 on the next page, policy professionals frequently move across different types of organizations, but there is also a large share that remains within the same organizational type. No one remains as a policy professional in the government offices due to the fact that political advisors go when their minister goes, and since the government changed hands in 2014 there was a complete overhaul of the political staff. The largest share remaining within the same organizational type is instead found among trade unions and other interest organizations, where about two-thirds remain in the same organizational type.

We also observe certain outflows that are less likely than others. There is little movement between trade unions and other interest organizations (a majority of which are associated with business interests) and between trade unions and PR firms.

We also find that very few policy professionals become politicians, which confirms their expressed reluctance to move into elected positions (Svallfors 2016a, 2017b). Instead, the most common destinations outside the policy professional field are private companies (other than PR firms) and public administration, including civil service positions.

In Table 2, we summarize how many in 2018 *remain* in the same organization they were in as of 2012, how many have *moved* to other organizations of the same or different organizational types, and how many have *exited* from the policy professional field.

As shown in Table 2, there is considerable flux in the field when we look at the specific organizations people work for in 2018 compared to 2012. Rather consistently across all organizational types (except for the government) there

Table 1: Movements between organizational types 2012-18 (no in-betweens)

2018 / 2012	Government	Parliament	Trade unions	Interest organi-zations	PR firms	Think tanks	Other (PP)	Public admini-stration	Private company	Politician	Other (not PP)	Total
Government	0 %	7 %	3 %	21 %	12 %	3 %	4 %	22 %	22 %	4 %	1 %	143
Parliament	14 %	44 %	4 %	7 %	7 %	0 %	5 %	6 %	7 %	4 %	1 %	162
Trade unions	4 %	4 %	67 %	5 %	1 %	3 %	1 %	10 %	4 %	0 %	0 %	141
Interest organi-zations	1 %	1 %	1 %	66 %	7 %	1 %	2 %	5 %	12 %	2 %	2 %	131
PR firms	1 %	4 %	1 %	8 %	56 %	0 %	3 %	4 %	20 %	1 %	1 %	157
Think tanks	4 %	6 %	2 %	9 %	7 %	56 %	0 %	4 %	7 %	0 %	6 %	54

Table 2: Remain, move, exit 2012-18

	Remain within organi-zation	Move within organiza-tional type	Move outside organi-zational type	Exit	Total
Government	0 %	0 %	55 %	45 %	143
Parliament	44 %	0 %	39 %	17 %	162
Trade unions	55 %	12 %	21 %	13 %	141
Interest organizations	50 %	16 %	14 %	21 %	131
PR firms	40 %	16 %	19 %	25 %	157
Think tanks	52 %	4 %	31 %	13 %	54
Total	39 %	8 %	30 %	23 %	788

is an almost even split between those who are attached to the same employer and those who have moved on to other organizations. PR consultants appear most mobile – 60 percent have left the organization for which they worked in 2012 – while policy professionals in trade unions and other major interest organizations exhibit the strongest tendency to remain.

The table also shows that no one has moved between different political parties (indicated by the "0" for Parliament by Move-Within-Organizational-Type), and hardly anyone has moved between two think tanks. In addition to what is found in the table, our data reveal that only one person has switched between the main employers' federation (*Svenskt näringsliv*) and either of the two main trade unions (*LO* and *TCO*) or their constituent member organizations. Furthermore, no one has ever moved from a think tank affiliated with the political left to one affiliated with the political right, or vice versa. This indicates that there are ideological barriers for moves within the field, something to which we will return later in the paper.

Table 2 also displays the propensity of policy professionals to exit from the field. This varies markedly across categories. Policy professionals from the government offices, interest organizations, and PR firms are most prone to exit (with private companies as the most common destination). It is interesting to observe that governmental political appointees, who belong to the innermost circles of power, are most likely to exit from the field.[4] People working for trade unions, political parties, or think tanks are less likely to do so.[5]

Table 3: Movements between positions 2012-18

From \ *To*	Manager	Policy	Communication	Other	Total
Manager	34 %	20 %	33 %	13 %	139
Policy	14 %	46 %	29 %	11 %	336
Communication	13 %	13 %	65 %	8 %	381
Other	12 %	18 %	27 %	42 %	33

The flux in the policy professional labour market indicates that the skills of these professionals are largely transferable between different types of organizations. However, there might be barriers other than ideology, namely, limitations on the kinds of positions attainable from which kinds of origins. To test this, Table 3 shows all movements between three broad functions among policy professionals: managers, policy officers, and communicators.[6] In contrast to Tables 1 and 2, Table 3 includes all job changes between 2012 and 2018 in order to show which transitions are more likely than others.

We find in Table 3 that almost two-thirds of job shifts from communication functions go to other communication functions, while about half of the job shifts from policy functions go to other policy functions. Managers' job changes are more evenly spread between functions, even though the most common job shift is to another management position. So, in summary, results from Table 3 suggest that there are also certain skill barriers in the policy professional labour market; these especially pertain to communication functions, which seem to be somewhat specialized and hence subject to within-function job shifts. We will return to this later, in the qualitative analysis.

The appeal of power

The analysis so far suggests there might be certain skill possessions and particular motivations that drive careers among Swedish policy professionals. Hence, the rest of the paper is dedicated to an analysis of these motivations and skills. Based on our interviews with a selection of "remainers", "movers", and "exiters", what could we say about the driving forces behind their career trajectories?

The whole field that policy professionals inhabit is imbued with political power, and previous research has shown that the desire to affect politics – and society at large – is the prime motivating force among policy professionals (Svallfors 2017a). In this sense, and in sharp contrast to the public service motivations that previous research has focussed, it is to be expected that power would be a key concern for them when deciding whether to remain or move. But a closer look at exactly what power – and power over what – motivates career decisions reveals a less obvious picture.

What emerges from the interviews is that there are at least three different ways in which power is central to the policy professionals' careers. Policy professionals are typically motivated by all three aspects of power, although their relative weight varies substantially among individuals. One is power as *agency*, the ability to affect decisions and outcomes. Here we find that what often motivates moves from one policy professional position to another is either a prospective power gain in a new position or an actual power loss in the previous position. But considerations about power as agency can also lie behind the decision to stay in a position because it offers power that cannot be matched elsewhere.

A research officer in a trade union is clear that the decision to stay in the current position is based on the fact that "your influence grows because you get more experience-based knowledge. You know what buttons to push, you know which politician to approach, you know which committee you should target to influence politics."

In a similar vein, someone at the other end of the political spectrum explains the decision to move from PR to an interest organization as a way to increase power as agency:

> If you are interested in public opinion, if you are interested in social issues, if you have a political background, and a political outlook that tilts toward the liberal spectrum, as I have, and think that questions about market economy and entrepreneurship and open borders and integration through work are important and so on, then it's hard to say no to doing this at an organization that above all has a very long time perspective, and also some muscle and some resources.

Yet another person explains why leaving a trade union office for public administration made sense:

> They reorganized, so the unit that I was responsible for – policy, politics, opinion, and influence – was incorporated into our huge negotiation department and got a somewhat different role, not as independent and not as much focused on public opinion /.../ They moved the research to the negotiation department and then they moved the PR bit itself to communication and then you lost some of the things we had been building for some years and that I was a part of.

The loss of power can sometimes, in a slightly paradoxical way, be the result of success for one's own political party. Once your own party gets into government, working in the parliament becomes less attractive since the important action will take place in the government offices. This political secretary explains why winning an election would be a reason for leaving parliament:

> I wouldn't like to stay in the parliamentary office if we were in government. That is super boring. I have a hard time seeing that there would be anything there that I would think was fun. You become very much a marketing department, and that bit I don't think is fun.

The second aspect is power as *proximity*, being close to power and to the spaces and circles where important decisions are made. The government offices offer the closest proximity to power, with all the ensuing buzz and excitement. This is often noticed most clearly by those who have been forced to leave because their party has lost the election or their minister has resigned. Many people long to go back to the glory days in the government offices:

> Maybe what I miss now is being in the midst of events. With all of these things happening. /.../ It is really a matter of life and death, almost. "This has to be solved." "Here is a proposal, we have to take a stand." It is fast, it is serious – "This will decide Swedish politics here and now."

The third aspect is power as *self-determination*, being able to define one's own expressed standpoints, strategies, and daily work. This is conspicuous in the way many policy professionals argue about the importance of keeping control of what they say and do, as explained by this former political advisor who now works at an interest organization: "In the position I have, I have to do what I believe in myself. /.../ So I have a great deal of freedom to act according to what I find right and reasonable."

Power as self-determination often implies a trade-off with power as agency. In the circles closest to power, it is often hard to achieve self-determination, as this advisor continues:

> You cannot set your own calendar, you cannot steer your own thoughts, but you must stay within a given frame and you often have to push issues, or at least it happens that you have to push issues that you definitely don't like.

Since power is so central to the policy professionals' motivations, hardly anyone admits to having actually lost power through their choices or forced circumstances. They are helped by the fact that various aspects of power may substitute for others, for example, losing proximity to power can be counter-balanced by gaining more self-determination. Furthermore, having strong personal influence in a less powerful organization may be substituted for less personal influence but in an organization that wields substantial power. This reluctance to admit a loss of power is a further indication of how important power is for the careers of policy professionals.

The lure of power is modified by policy professionals' need to find personal financial security in their volatile labour market. Although many of them are adamant that salary is not an important factor in their decisions about career moves, others point to the need for, and problems with finding, future employment as one important consideration behind their career decisions. Furthermore, most would be unhappy to be paid less in a new position compared to the one they left.

The ambivalent attitude toward pay is clearly articulated in this description of a salary negotiation in the government offices:

> They always have to ask what salary you want and then I had 35k, and I wanted 45k, and she was like "that is a 10k raise", and I was like "yeah..." and then she started to babble on about how I should think about those who were the same age as me and worked at the party headquarters with the web and so on and that they would be envious. /.../
>
> *But what if she had said "no, 35k, you don't get anything more", would you then have gone home and complained a bit and then still accepted it?*

> Yes.
>
> *You would have?*
>
> I would have, yes.

For most policy professionals, however, power is much more important than money, and some of them even left much better-paid positions in private companies to be able to wield influence. At the same time, bills need to get paid, and some stress the uncertainty of their positions and the need to find employment before their skills start to depreciate, as explained by a former political advisor:

> Immediately I guess I felt a small nagging worry. Had I been completely unaffected by that, I don't think I would have taken [the last job], but you never know. Your human capital degenerates, after all. You wouldn't be able to be on leave for two years and then get a decent job. Actually.

This is also a consequence of the fact that people get accustomed to certain lifestyles and may be reluctant to compromise these, even if money is not the most important consideration.

So in sum, power in its various guises is the most important motivation behind policy professionals' career decisions, even if this is tempered by motivations related to material rewards and security. But often, no strong trade-off has to be made since the most powerful positions also tend to be comparatively well paid.

Avenues, Barriers, and Exits

What makes policy professionals employable in a large variety of organizations is the set of skills, described in a previous section, that provides them with knowledge of the political system. This knowledge is hard to acquire anywhere other than in policy-related positions, and it has limited marketability outside the policy professional sphere, mostly confined to the public affairs divisions of large companies and, to a smaller extent, various public agencies (Allern 2011, Svallfors 2016a). But in the policy professional labour market, these skills are quite fungible across a variety of organizations and positions (Parker 2009).

The fungibility of their political skills could in principle result in career patterns that stretch equally across all kinds of positions and organizations. Still, as we showed in Tables 1–3, some career moves are far less common than others. A reason for this has to do with ideological barriers. However, there might be other barriers as well, such as those related to skills.

In the previous section, it was revealed that two-thirds of the switches from communication led to other positions in communication, while half of those

who worked with policy moved on to other policy functions. Is this indicative of two largely separate career tracks and, if so, what is the underlying reason? A political advisor in the government offices describes considerations about the next job:

> Should I confess that it is communication I am good at and seek jobs as a communication strategist and head of communication, with the risk of getting stuck there, or should I try to branch out into policy or something where I can work with analysis? The risk is that you end up in the communication fold. For example, it is very rare that the chief of communication [for a party] becomes a government minister, because you become part of the "those-who-just-deal-with-the-surface gang" instead of those who deal with content.

While a skill barrier might somewhat separate communication from policy, many interviewees acknowledge that a policy professional needs to be good at both and that their future careers are not limited to one or the other. Rather, it is the preference for one over the other that constitutes the barrier. As put by a former political advisor who used to work with communication:

> A totally central aspect of Swedish politics, or politics in general, is to be able to formulate yourself in a way that is punchy and helps your superiors to communicate their message in punchy ways. I wish I didn't have to do that. /.../ I don't want to become a communication advisor, and I don't see myself as a communication advisor./.../ I don't think the work tasks are as interesting. They do not reach the same level of originality and the career tracks are less interesting.

Apart from preferences for certain functions, there are three barriers that influence the policy professional job market: *ideological commitments*, *loyalties,* and *value hierarchies*. The ideological commitment as a career determinant has already been discussed in the quantitative analysis. Since a certain political outlook is usually what brought policy professionals into their line of work in the first place, it is no surprise that this commitment features prominently in their later career decisions. A former political advisor explains: "I am deeply bourgeois and I believe in liberal and liberal-conservative values, but what engages me most of all is getting the right politics and the right policy."

Ideological commitment is tightly linked to various types of loyalties.[7] Here we may make a distinction between loyalty to specific persons and loyalty to specific parties or organizations. Many policy professionals in the government and party offices voice a strong personal loyalty to "their" leading politician, as expressed by this former advisor: "I work for [this particular minister] and no one else. /.../ I do not work for someone I don't like."

Others are more loyal to specific organizations, as this political advisor of a struggling party recounts:

> Then she [the headhunter] came back with a different offer without the disadvantages I had identified earlier, but I still said no. Then I realized that I actually wanted to take this the whole way. That I felt a loyalty and that I didn't want to leave when the polls looked so bad. I did not want to betray them.

Ideological commitment and specific loyalties are important not only to policy professionals but also to the organizations that hire them. No party or other organization would hire someone whose ideological commitment and loyalty could not be trusted, which would often be the case if they had ever worked for ideological opponents (Svallfors 2016b: 66). Conversely, proven loyalty and ideological commitment increase the market value of policy professionals within their ideological camp.

Loyalties and commitments are also the basis for value hierarchies regarding jobs and positions. In particular, many policy professionals express reluctance to work for the PR industry. PR is a stigmatized line of work precisely because of lack of commitment, loyalty, and transparency: "No one can really be held accountable because they are not responsible for the issues, but they charge a fee for conducting a mission and then they don't have any responsibility any longer."

The stigmatization of PR and lobbying is also evident in the negative reactions some policy professionals express regarding (some aspects of) our previous book on policy professionals (Garsten, Rothstein, and Svallfors 2015). Some of the political advisors, research officers, and political directors feel clearly contaminated by being lumped together with the PR consultants under a common label. As put by a political director at a trade union:

> I don't feel like a threat to democracy. I am pretty open about what I do. I work on behalf of our members, I don't have any secret financiers. My financiers are membership fees.
>
> *Others have also talked about being lumped together with a whole profession...*
>
> Yes, like KPMG or Kreab, who will not disclose their financiers or their clients and blah blah blah. It is weird. I don't feel I'm there at all. I have no secret clients, we are completely transparent. I think these are different things. We are not a PR firm!

At the same time, many PR consultants clearly express and enact an ideological commitment in their work. Many of them actively search for clients that may finance projects to which the consultants themselves are ideologically attached, and they are far from "guns for hire" for any and all causes (Tyllström and Murray 2019).

Many policy professionals cannot envisage a career outside their current field, but some do choose to exit from the field. Some of these exiters clearly articulate fatigue with the demanding world of policy professionalism and with the stressful life it entails. For those who exit from the policy professional field, elected office is rarely the destination. Being a politician is seen as even harder work than being a policy professional, and as less fun. Instead, they opt for public administration or private companies, which offer better pay for less work and less pressure.

In summary, despite the broad avenues that open up to policy professionals because of the specific skills they possess, there are (partly self-placed) hurdles, or even barriers, related to skill varieties, ideological commitments, loyalties, and value hierarchies. These factors govern the careers of policy professionals. Even if the majority of policy professionals choose to stay within the field, because it offers power, interesting tasks, and relatively good financial compensation, the world of politics is stressful and demanding, including for policy professionals. This is why some of them choose the exit ramp to private companies or public administration.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have described the field of policy professionalism through an analysis of Swedish policy professionals and their careers. We found that job hopping happens quite frequently. Less than half of the policy professionals remained in the same organization after six years. This demonstrates that there is a job market for policy professionals. Subsequently, the aim was to understand what skills, motivations, and barriers govern the policy professionals' careers.

First, it is clear that their skills are fungible and make them employable across a broad set of organizations in their field. This is also clearly the perception among the policy professionals themselves, in that they see themselves as possessing specific political skills that are hard to acquire outside of the real world of politics, policy advocacy, and policy making.

As for motivations, we found that considerations regarding different aspects of power were central: power as agency, power as proximity, and power as self-determination all figured in decisions to remain, move, or exit. At the same time, the lure of power was tempered by the need to find security in a volatile labour market and by an unwillingness to earn less in a new job. For exiters from the policy professional field, the perception that politics is stressful and demanding also figured. Hardly anyone wants to move, or has actually moved, to elected positions because of the high demands that are placed upon elected representatives.

In their motivations, policy professionals therefore come across as quite different from public administrators, whose motivations have been subject for substantial research efforts (see previous section). The strongly partisan orientation of policy professionals and the appeal of power in their motivations are radically different from those espoused by public administrators. Furthermore, their loyalties are to specific causes, persons and organizations rather than to a public system, and they are driven less by considerations of public interest than by a desire to change society according to their ideological commitments. Policy professionals are just as much political animal as elected politicians, although of a different kind.

Our next question related to specific barriers, or at least hurdles, in the policy professional labour market. We saw that policy analysts and communicators to some extent follow separate labour market paths. The main reason for this has less to do with different skill sets and is more connected to a preference for one over the other. Instead, the strongest barriers are different ideological commitments, personal and organizational loyalties, and value hierarchies that make policy professionals reluctant to move anywhere their skills could take them. No one ever shifts between the political left and the political right, or even between different political parties within the same ideological bloc. Many policy professionals are reluctant to move to the PR industry because of its perceived lack of personal commitment, loyalty, and transparency. For example, hardly anybody moves between trade unions and PR firms.

In conclusion, we would like to highlight three different implications of our findings for the broader question of what the appearance of this category of political actors and the field they inhabit mean for democracy and political power.

The first implication concerns the fact that there is now a fairly extensive labour market in which political skills are bought and sold. This indicates a more thorough professionalization of politics than the one related to elected politicians becoming full-time employees rather than part-time laypersons. Policy professionals typically possess large quantities of human and social capital associated with politics and policy making. This in itself contributes to political inequality by enlarging the skill gulf between ordinary citizens and party/organization members on the one hand and the professionalized political stratum on the other.

But since these specific skills have a comparatively small market outside the policy professional field, policy professionals face certain labour market problems. For example, who will hire a recent exiter from the government offices for a reasonably exciting and well-paid job? These labour market problems are alleviated by the rise of a large PR sector and by the growth of public affairs divisions in large companies. Profit-oriented actors have a great incentive to

track and affect political decision making. Therefore, they need politically savvy employees, regardless of whether these are hired on a temporary basis through a PR firm or are permanently employed in-house. Hence, the rise of policy professionals also implies a blurring of institutional boundaries between government, civil society organizations, and private business, and makes financial resources even more important for political success.

The second implication of our research concerns the barriers related to the professionalization of politics and policy making. It is simply not the case that policy professionals have morphed into a specialized corps that can and will take any job where their skills might be in demand. Their field is permeated with loyalties, commitments, and value hierarchies that substantially affect their career paths and decisions. In sum, we should perhaps speak of a semi-professionalization of politics since it is circumscribed by factors other than the supply of and demand for specific skills. Hence, some of the democratically dubious implications of their rise are ameliorated by the fact that policy professionals are politically committed and divided, like the individuals and organizations they serve.

The last implication we want to highlight concerns the dispersion of political skills to new arenas and actors. What we are witnessing is the policy professionalization of not only the political world but of adjacent fields as well. Knowledge of the political system and specific political skills become keys to success not only in the policy professional field but in any organization or activity that is affected by political decisions (that is to say, most organizations and activities). When policy professionals move into organizations outside their own field, they bring with them their typical modus operandi. In this process, they spread these to organizations (such as profit-oriented companies or public administration) whose primary raison d'être is different from political influence-making. This is yet another way in which the boundary-spanning characteristics of policy professionals contribute to blurring institutional boundaries in perhaps unwanted and democratically problematic ways.

Any strong conclusions of our research must, of course, be tempered by the fact that we have only studied policy professionals in one specific country. In this regard, we may think of Sweden as an interesting test case of how the policy professional field is set up and functions in a post-corporatist country with strong interest organizations and long-standing political parties and divisions. In future research, this could be compared, for example, to long-standing pluralist and yet highly organized settings (say, the Netherlands), to more rudimentary and fleeting organizational landscapes (such as those found in many Eastern European countries), or to more personalized political systems (such as those found in many Anglo-Saxon countries). Such institutional and organizational factors affect the policy professional field and are therefore likely

to also affect career opportunities, motivations, and trajectories among policy professionals.

Notes

1. Selection criteria for organizations and positions are explicated in detail in our Web appendix.

2. See Web appendix for a comparison of the 2012/3 and the 2018 interviewees.

3. See Web appendix for details.

4. One could suspect that the specific pattern of moves and exits from the government offices was due to the fact that it was a right-wing outgoing government. However, a comparison with the exit of the Social Democratic government in 2006 reveals almost identical patterns to the ones in Table 2 (figures available from authors).

5. The results presented in this section were roughly similar when split by gender. There are, however, a few minor differences between men and women. First, women were less likely to have remained in the same organization (31 percent of women, compared to 44 percent of men). Second, they were more likely have moved into a different organizational type (36 percent., compared to 25 percent of men). These patterns hold across virtually all types of organizations. Third, even if men and women exit at the same rate, the PR industry is an exception. Whereas 21 percent of the men employed in the PR sector in 2012 had exited the PP field six years later, the corresponding figure for women was 32 percent. (Tables are available from authors.)

6. A *manager* is a person who leads an organization. Typical job titles include managing director, chief of staff, and head of office. Individuals who are developing policy proposals are classified as *policy*. Their typical job titles include policy advisor, research officer, and political director. *Communication* includes those whose primary responsibility is to disseminate information and maintain interpersonal relationships with media and politicians. Examples of this category are press secretaries, information officers, communicators, and public affairs experts. PR consultants have all been classified as "communication". Although this is probably adequate in most cases, their job may still include some policy proposal work, depending on the specific mission and person. However, removing PR consultants from the table gives virtually the same results as those presented.

7. One could even see ideological commitment as one variety of loyalty, a loyalty to specific interests or causes.

Bios

Niels Selling is a Post-doc researcher at the Institute for Future Studies in Stockholm. He obtained his PhD in Political Science from the European University Institute. His dissertation explored corporate political preference formation among large American, British and German firms. He has written about policy professionals, corporate lobbying, the revolving door and the political strategies of the Swedish for-profit welfare sector. His research interests focus on corporate political activity, business power, political economy and elites.

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