

Chapter 16

Public bureaucracies

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Abstract

Public bureaucracies have mostly been invisible in research on political communication, but more recently, there has been an increasing interest in their communicative efforts. In this chapter, we review the literature and synthesise the scholarship on Nordic public bureaucracies in relation to political communication. Three research areas are put to the fore: 1) Mediatisation: how and to what extent bureaucracies prioritise the media and what consequences it has for activities, routines, and resource allocations across organisational contexts; 2) Reputation management: why and how bureaucracies make use of communication to build, maintain, and protect their reputation; and 3) Crisis communication: public actors' abilities to provide information and support to citizens and communities before, during, and after crises. Although highly interconnected in practice, these strands of literature have largely been three separate academic discussions. We therefore suggest that a first step to consolidate research on communication and public bureaucracies would be to combine the knowledge research has gained in terms of media management, reputation management, and crisis communication. Such an effort would provide a much broader, but also detailed, knowledge on the motives, organising, content, and consequences of public bureaucracies and their communicative efforts.

Keywords: public bureaucracies, mediatisation, crisis communication, reputation management, strategic communication

Introduction

A faceless system inhabited by introverted, grey pedants, governed by rules, laws, and paragraphs and providing incomprehensible technical accounts. Public bureaucracies are often understood as anonymous, but reliable, neutral experts behind media-oriented politicians and leaders. They have mostly been invisible in research on political communication (Salomonsen et al., 2016), as scholars primarily have focused on party politics in general and party leaders, prime ministers

Figenschou, T. U., Fredriksson, M., Kolltveit, K., & Pallas, J. (2021). Public bureaucracies. In E. Skogerbø, Ø. Ihlen, N. N. Kristensen, & L. Nord (Eds.), *Power, communication, and politics in the Nordic countries* (pp. 325–345). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. <https://doi.org/10.48335/9789188855299-16>

or presidents, and prominent members of parliament in particular. In a similar manner, scholars from public administration have largely emphasised reforms of politico-administrative systems, with changing organisational values, structures, and policy processes in their research, without explicitly studying the role of media and communication in these processes (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2006).

More recently, there has been an increasing interest in the communicative efforts made by public bureaucracies. To some extent, this research focuses on bureaucracies when they act as instruments for the political executive, and accordingly, become involved in government communication (Johansson & Nygren, 2019). But it is also research highlighting the use of communication among bureaucracies when they give voice to their own interests as “players in politics” (Moe, 1995: 131) to realise and cultivate their own interests. In this chapter, we review this literature and synthesise the scholarship on Nordic public bureaucracies in relation to political communication.

Public bureaucracies: Actors and institutions

By public bureaucracies, we mean central government entities such as ministries and agencies, as well as regional and local bodies. What they all have in common is their embeddedness in a public service ethos in which regulations and norms of transparency, accountability, and privacy protection are paramount. Civil servants are expected to act with integrity and impartiality (Olsen, 2008), and compared to other types of organisations analysed in this anthology, it is evident that public bureaucracies encounter certain formal constraints, which, arguably, make communication more challenging (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2016a).

For instance, decisions in public bureaucracies are regulated by law, official statute, or decree. Civil servants are expected to contribute with policy advice, loyally execute policy decisions set by political majorities (evaluate the consequences and the costs and benefits, as well as the implementation of these), and provide public services including often unending or unsolvable problems (e.g., unemployment, conditions of the poor, and protecting consumer rights). Today, an active public demands efficient public services and gives direct responses to public organisations in real time (Canel & Luoma-aho, 2019). Consequently, public bureaucracies (particularly large, service-delivering public agencies) often become subject of intense media attention (Boon et al., 2018), which brings them into blame games (Hood, 2011).

Another peculiarity is that public bureaucracies’ communication is guided by information and communication mandates defined and constrained by freedom of information laws and public service codes of conduct (Laursen & Valentini, 2015), with an emphasis on neutral, factual, and comprehensive information. To ensure that public bureaucracies conduct their activities according to appropri-

ate rules ensuring predictability and accountability, their activities are morally and legally bound to be open and transparent. The purpose of bureaucratic communication can thus be seen as providing citizens with the information they need as citizens and voters. In most cases, this means that the public and other interest groups (including media) ought to be given general access to documents and acts received or drawn up by public agencies and ministries (Hood & Heald, 2006).

In addition to this, we also have to add that public bureaucracies operate in increasingly complex communication environments (Canel & Luoma-aho, 2019), interacting with an extensive number of stakeholders – ranging between politicians, other public sector organisations, citizens, corporations, unions, media, industry organisations, experts, and lobby organisations. The communication landscape of public bureaucracies has become more uncertain and unstable as public bureaucracies have become complex organisations after multiple reforms (Christensen et al., 2007), the media landscape has changed dramatically (Chadwick, 2013), and more stakeholders are employing a greater range of media platforms in more sophisticated ways to gain political influence (Figenschou, 2020; Kuhn & Nielsen, 2014). For public bureaucracies, these stakeholders often represent divergent (and sometimes competing) interests, as they are expected and even legally bound to take all interests under consideration and realise them without favouring one over another (Salomonsen, 2013).

In many ways, these circumstances are general and unavoidable, but it is worth noting that various actors and departments within these organisations hold different communicative mandates and agendas which all impact their strategic communication.

The Nordic politico-administrative systems

As with media systems, the politico-administrative systems in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden share a number of features. They are all unitary states, with varying degrees of power delegated to regional and local levels of government (Knutsen, 2017), and they are parliamentary democracies often governed by coalition governments (Lægreid, 2017). While Denmark, Norway, and Sweden are constitutional monarchies, Finland and Iceland are presidential systems. In all countries, there is a strong legal basis of the state, combined with a strong *étatist*, state-welfare, and deep-seated democratic orientation (Painter & Peters, 2010).

However, there are some important differences amongst the countries, potentially affecting political communication in public bureaucracies. First, the ministerial responsibility differs. In Sweden, there is a constitutional ban on individual ministerial decisions; instead, all cabinet decisions are made collectively

(Lindbom, 1997). In Finland as well, all ministers are collectively responsible for cabinet decisions. In Denmark, Iceland, and Norway, the principle of ministerial rule applies, meaning that individual ministers make decisions and are responsible for their own ministries and their subordinate agencies (Greve et al., 2016). These differences raise the question of how the promotion of individual ministers is balanced against promotion of the cabinet agenda.

Second, there is variation in the politicisation of ministries, understood here as the number of political appointees. While Danish and Icelandic ministers only have one special advisor each (Kristinsson, 2016), there are over five or six different political appointees for each minister in Sweden. Norway and Finland lie somewhat between (Kolltveit, 2016; Shaw & Eichbaum, 2018; Sundström, & Lemne, 2016). The differences in ministerial entourage raise the questions of how much civil servants are involved in helping promote their media-oriented ministers and how they potentially shield the civil servants from engaging in party-political work (Figenschou et al., 2020).

Third, in Sweden and Finland, ministerial rule is prohibited, creating a dual system with formally autonomous agencies (Sundström & Lemne, 2016). This means that agencies in the Nordic countries are formally accountable to different “types” of governments bodies. This dual versus integrated structure raises the question of how ministry-agency relations play out, for instance, during crises and reputational threats.

Fourth, while the Nordic countries are sometimes referred to as cautious friends of new public management (NPM) (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011), they have differed somewhat in their NPM reform trajectories. Sweden and Finland have applied NPM reforms – such as privatisation of government-owned corporations and management by objectives and results – more eagerly than Denmark, Iceland, and Norway (Lapsley & Knutsson, 2016). Amongst other things, the NPM reforms have affected the autonomy of agencies. While subordinate agencies in countries like Denmark and Norway have gained (de facto) autonomy following NPM reforms and structural changes, ministers have regained some of the political control through widespread use of management by objectives and results (Christensen & Lægheid, 2006). At the same time, international research shows that most systems experience increasing levels of political interventions (Peters & Pierre, 2004).

Central approaches and theories

The policies and practices of communication in public bureaucracies have been prioritised and professionalised over time. Communication experts have become a natural and prominent part of public bureaucracies as communication units have expanded in recent years (Falasca & Nord, 2013; Jakobs & Wonneberger,

2017; Sanders et al., 2011; Wonneberger & Jakobs, 2016). Moreover, communication units in public bureaucracies are increasingly placed directly under the central command, working across the departments and the traditional hierarchical organisational structures in public bureaucracies (Thorbjørnsrud et al., 2014), as a testament to the increased emphasis on communication.

Partly, this runs parallel to the development of new governance structures and political ambitions to turn bureaucracies into “proper” or “complete” organisations (Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 2000). That way, the idea of strategic communication has become essential, as it offers strategies, work models, and routines adapted from business organisations to legitimise and support the transformation of public administrations alongside the NPM rationales (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2016b). But it is also a development that takes place in the light of a general growth of communication experts and an increase of policy professionals across parliaments, ministries, parties, and bureaucracies (Garsten et al., 2015). Within ministries, these policy professionals have been known as ministerial advisors (Hustedt et al., 2017; Shaw & Eichbaum, 2018). Taken together, these developments have boosted the importance of strategic communication and political public relations within ministries and public agencies (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2016a; Strömbäck & Kiosis, 2019).

On this background, research projects have been initiated in Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark from the late 2000s onwards. Over time, three main bodies of research have developed, including research on media management and mediatisation, reputation management, and crisis communication. In each, key contributions in the international literature originate from Nordic scholars and scholarly networks, building on rich empirical data and contributing conceptual debates.

Media management and mediatisation

A substantial literature has studied how public bureaucracies deal with the news media. Since media management in public agencies was largely uncovered terrain, the first strand of studies was exploratory in asking: How do public bureaucracies meet media requests and criticism? How do they present policy in the news media? To what extent is media visibility important for public bureaucracies? And if, and how, does media management impact on organisational priorities, routines, and practices?

Broadly, studies of media management distinguish between reactive media strategies (how media requests are logged, dealt with, and responded to) and proactive media strategies (how the organisation takes initiative towards the media to inform and promote). Based on empirically grounded research projects, the following key characteristics of media management have been emphasised in a Nordic context.

First, studying how public bureaucracies deal with the news media in a time with rolling deadlines, continuous critical news coverage, and media-oriented political leaders, studies found that government ministries and agencies have routinised reactive media management: they monitor media coverage; the communication desk operates a 24/7 press service; and media requests are dealt with in designated meetings. The communication staff take the media requests to the other departments to prepare background and talking points, which are edited by communication experts and presented in the media by agency leaders or designated spokespersons. These internal processes involve disagreements, negotiations, and compromises between the different professions and departments in the organisation (Johansson & Nygren, 2019; Pallas et al., 2016; Thorbjørnsrud et al., 2014).

Second, asking whether and how media management impact on organisational priorities, routines, and practices, studies find that public bureaucracies strive to adapt to the rhythm and format of the news media (Thorbjørnsrud et al., 2014), as news stories are “always” prioritised and largely set internal agendas (Figenschou et al., 2019). Public servants experience that the media’s agenda-setting also impacts on resource allocation and case decisions – under certain conditions such as massive media pressure, broad popular and political mobilisation, and the government politicians’ priorities (Figenschou et al., 2019; Ihlen & Thorbjørnsrud, 2014b; Kunelius & Reunanen, 2012).

Third, analysing when public bureaucracies are challenged by the media and how they deal with critical coverage, another strand of literature has emphasised the dilemmas and limits of reactive media management. In recent years, when individual citizens suffer the consequences of failed policies and poor services, they increasingly raise their case in the news media or social media (Canel & Luoma-aho, 2019). The negative coverage represents a burden for many public servants. To manage such a coverage, public bureaucracies employ a number of strategies (Ihlen & Thorbjørnsrud, 2014a) and changes in policies (Knudsen, 2016). For government ministries and their leaders, balancing the need to be visible and demonstrate agency in the media (Figenschou et al., 2017) with institutional constraints and the formal delegation of responsibility limits the communication repertoire available, and often results in a standard type of unconvincing media performance (Thorbjørnsrud & Figenschou, 2018).

Fourth, studies find a new and growing emphasis on proactive media management in public bureaucracies as a result of changing journalist–public bureaucracy relations, intense media pressure, and increasing awareness of reputation and strategic communication in the public sector (Malling, 2019). Civil servants justify such proactive pitches of news stories from government agencies to selected journalists and media outlets as a necessary counter-strategy to set the agenda otherwise dominated by “critical” and “hostile” media campaigns (Figenschou & Thorbjørnsrud, 2015). Internal discussions often concern when

and where to pitch policies and how to follow up, with expert bureaucrats constituting an internal buffer and communication experts and politicians driving proactive initiatives. Fundamental proactive media strategies employed by communication experts include involving the minister (personalisation of ministerial communication) and offering exclusivity (Figenschou et al., 2017). Overall, this new emphasis on selective proactive leaks and pitches exemplifies the trend towards a more professional, yet more informal, government communication (Malling, 2019).

Together, these studies build on and contribute to the theorisation of mediatisation (e.g., Lundby, 2014), an area where Nordic scholars have been internationally leading (see, e.g., Asp, 2014; Hjarvard, 2008; Lundby, 2009; Strömbäck, 2008). In short, mediatisation refers to the institutionalisation of media and how ideas regarding media's functionalities, values, work methods, and effects are widely distributed across sectors and fields and eventually intervene with the organisations' activities, decisions, and communication. Broadly, mediatisation comprises both how different institutions and organisations adapt to and adopt media logics, and how they use these to promote and secure the organisations' values and aims. Nordic scholars have predominantly studied these processes on the meso-level, employing mixed methods, case studies, and comprehensive ethnographic data, which have arguably enabled some important theoretical contributions.

Conceptualising how public bureaucracies adapted to, and adopted, a news logic, Thorbjørnsrud and colleagues (2014) elaborated the news logic concept and positioned this research within a neo-institutional approach to news journalism (Cook, 1998), stressing that the news logic largely works as a logic of appropriateness – self-evident, given, natural, and hence not the object of deliberation (March & Olsen, 2006). Insights that the media-first approach is largely practice-driven, tacit knowledge, and often not formalised in existing communication plans and policies represent a key contribution here. Overall, the resources spent on media work and the prioritisation of media requests are perceived as necessary, important, and self-evident (although there are variations between different professions and parts of the organisation), and these priorities are thus difficult to change or challenge (Figenschou et al., 2017; Thorbjørnsrud et al., 2014).

How the (news) media logic is embedded in and translated into particular contexts (Pallas et al., 2016) and the need to understand mediatisation within the distinct type of organisation (public bureaucracies) (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2020) represent a second key contribution to mediatisation literature. This approach illuminates how logics are translated locally, and hence do not always collide with or colonise other organisational logics (Pallas et al., 2016) and challenge strict perceptions of a media logic versus political and administrative logics (Kunelius & Reunanen, 2012).

Reputation management

Over the last decade, the concept of reputation has resurfaced in research on bureaucracies (Carpenter, 2010; Carpenter & Krause, 2012; Maor, 2007, 2010, 2011; Maor & Wæraas, 2015), and it has attracted broad scholarly attention from scholars studying communication, management, political science, and others (Barnett & Pollock, 2012; Chun, 2005; Fomnrun & Van Riel, 2004). “Reputation” has been defined as the “set of beliefs about an organisation’s capacities, intentions, history, and mission that are embedded in a network of multiple audiences” (Carpenter, 2010: 34), and in this context, bureaucracies build, maintain, and protect their reputation to generate public support and to accrue autonomy and discretion from politicians (Carpenter, 2002). Thus, bureaucracies face a complex web of reputational concerns regarding how they are conceived by multiple audiences prioritising different dimensions of their work (Carpenter, 2010).

Research on bureaucratic reputation often refers to the framework of Carpenter (2001, 2002) and asks how regulatory agencies balance the various reputation elements related to performance (does the agency do its job?); morality (does the agency protect the interests of its clients?); technical expertise (does the agency have the skills and capacity required?); and procedures (does the agency follow accepted rules and norms?). In their comparative study of agencies in the societal security sector in Denmark, Germany, Norway, Sweden, and the UK, Christensen and Lodge (2016) find several differences across the studied cases. For instance, autonomy is emphasised across the Swedish agencies, reflecting their long tradition of agency autonomy, and Sweden also scores higher on individual moral symbols than Norway, something Christensen and Lodge say might reflect a higher level of adoption of NPM-related themes in Sweden. In a similar study of Norwegian regulatory agencies, Christensen and Gornitzka (2019) find that agencies tend to emphasise outputs and outcomes of their activities (performance), with increasing emphasis on professional and technical aspects, as well as moral values, over time. In Christensen and Gornitzka’s study, reputation is explained by the age of the agency, as well as the audience that the agency is trying to reach. Sector and tasks are less relevant.

Carpenter’s (2001, 2002) framework attributes some relevance to communication but it is sub-oriented to decision-making and other activities (Maor, 2015). Among Nordic scholars, communication has been put at the fore and accordingly much more attention has been paid to reputation management – that is to say, a recipe for how organisations are to organise, allocate resources, distribute responsibilities, and perform communication activities to create and maintain a strong reputation (Byrkjeflot, 2015). Studies from Denmark (Nielsen & Salomonsen, 2012), Norway (Wæraas et al., 2011), and Sweden (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2016a) show that the recipe has gained wide distribution in public

sector organisations. Wæraas and colleagues (2011) have made an extensive contribution to Nordic research, and within this scholarship, the branding and reputation management of local government has received considerable attention. Wæraas and colleagues (2014) find that Norwegian municipalities brand themselves as places, organisations, and political institutions, with all three branding strategies being almost equally important. In her longitudinal study of reputation projects in two Norwegian municipalities, Bjørnå (2016) finds that the mayor or chief executive functions as a reputational agent, with different motives and politically conscious strategies. Lockert and colleagues' (2019) recent study targeted mayors and other persons responsible for strategic communication in Norwegian and Danish municipalities. They found that local government responses to reputation reform depended on the size of the municipality and the type of actors involved. The larger the municipality, the more the administration was involved. Further on, the more administrative actors were involved, the more the strategies targeted organisational reputation.

The application of reputation management is not without problems, however; among other things, it challenges (legal) requirements for openness and transparency (Wæraas, 2008). Reputation management promotes autonomy, consistency, and organisational control, whereas openness is related to collective welfare, governance, and accountability, and consequently, bureaucracies must handle tensions between the two ideas. To do this, agencies make use of several different strategies – all of them contributing to the transformation and hybridisations of both reputation management and what it means to be “open” (Fredriksson & Edwards, 2019).

Concerning the empirical focus of Nordic studies, a considerable body of research has focused on certain sectors, especially within higher education and universities (Christensen et al., 2018; Sataøen, 2015; Sataøen & Wæraas, 2016), within the health sector and hospitals (Sataøen, & Wæraas, 2015), and the police (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2015). Much emphasis has also been put on subordinate agencies and municipalities, whereas ministries have received little attention. However, Salomonsen and colleagues (2016) find that permanent civil servants in Danish ministries to some degree are involved in strategic communication to accommodate the realisation of political goals. Concerning the methods used in the Nordic studies, a wide variety exist. Some have used content analysis of web pages (Christensen et al., 2018; Sataøen & Wæraas, 2016), others have used interviews with communication managers (Sataøen & Wæraas, 2015), and still others have used surveys (Lockert et al., 2019).

The scholarship on reputation management in the Nordic countries is well established and growing. What seems to be missing, however, are studies on how reputation management is actively used by subordinate agencies to accrue more autonomy and discretion from politicians (Carpenter, 2002). As underlined by Luoma-Aho (2007), public sector organisation does not necessarily need a

strong reputation, as this might demand a lot of resources and become a burden. A neutral reputation is sufficient and enables a critical operating distance from interference from the political masters (Luoma-Aho, 2007). Further on, reputation management in central government entities, such as ministries, has received limited attention. Although ministries, to a lesser extent than agencies, might be autonomy seeking, reputation management is still highly important towards external stakeholders, for instance when their unique reputation as trustworthy developers of public policies is under threat.

Crisis communication

A third stream of Nordic research focuses on bureaucracies' crisis communication. In the wake of social unrest caused by the welfare state's inability to fulfil the promises of general welfare, security, and equal civil rights (Voss & Lorenz, 2016), scholars and bureaucrats alike have showed increased interest for its applicability. Public agencies are central players in the welfare state, and it is evident that bureaucrats in general, and communicators working for agencies in particular, often get significant responsibilities for communication in large-scale crises (Olsson, 2014). Accordingly, crisis communication has become a central component in their communication repertoires. Scholars have followed suit, not least because of the extensive funding governments and agencies offer, and today, crisis communication is an expansive theme in the Nordic countries, especially in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden (Frandsen & Johansen, 2016).

The interest in public organisations distinguishes Nordic scholars from international colleagues, who largely give precedence to corporations. This also means that the interest for organisational reputation, vital to much international research, is less prominent among Nordic scholars (cf. Christensen & Lægreid, 2015). In the Nordic context, much more attention has been given to resilience and public actors' abilities to provide information and support to citizens and communities, not just to manage the acute phases of a crises, but also to help and support actors to recover after a crises and to restore trust in institutions and public organisations (Olsson, 2014). This, in turn, means that much research has focused on the interactions between agencies, news media, and the public.

Given the strong connections between practice and research, a significant amount of the work on bureaucracy and crisis communication has been designated to find solutions to the problems and challenges agencies and public bodies encounter. Consequently, many publications are reports or articles written by scholars commissioned by government organisations, often with an extraordinary event as a point of departure, such as the 2008 financial crisis (Johansson & Nord, 2011), the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull in 2010 (Bird et

al., 2018), or the terrorist attack in Norway in 2011 (Socialstyrelsen, 2012). It also means that research on public agencies and crisis communication, rather than a field or theory, is a problem or theme studied in a number of different disciplines, including media and communication studies, political science, tourist studies, volcanology, and others. The diversity is also evident when it comes to topics. There are examples of studies focusing on what crisis communication can imply for the public's trust in bureaucracies (Christensen & Lægheid, 2015; Nord & Shehata, 2013), what it means to communicate to heterogeneous audiences (Olofsson, 2007) or certain audience groups (Sjöberg, 2018), and what rhetoric agencies make use of in crises (Johansson & Odén, 2018). Two themes are prominent, however.

The first prominent theme is how agencies organise, plan, manage, and perform their communication activities before, during, and after crises. Among other things, studies have shown limitations in how agencies organise and set up their routines to make sure that they are notified when something happens or is about to happen – events that are, or can develop into, a crisis. Studies covering Finland and Sweden (Kivikuru & Nord, 2009) showed the difficulties agencies had when they were set to master the situation after the tsunami in the Indian Ocean in 2004. The time (Christmas) and the place (South East Asia) were contributory factors, but overall, agencies showed obvious inabilities to act and provide information, support, and responses to those who posed questions. The tsunami event led to several investigations and commissioned research projects, and Frandsen and Johansen (2016) suggest that governments and civil services in all Nordic countries have learned a lot from the events. The question is not settled, however, and there are several examples of more recent studies showing that the problem still exists, for instance, during the terrorist attack in Norway in 2011 (Christensen & Lægheid, 2015) and the wildfires in Sweden in 2014 (Odén et al., 2016).

A second prominent theme is agencies' abilities to get their messages through. Historically, this has primarily been a question of media relations and news coverage. Scholars (and bureaucrats) have shown extensive interest in how news media report and to what extent citizens can rely on media reporting when they encounter a crisis (Kivikuru, 2006). The interest for news media is still evident both among bureaucrats (Odén et al., 2016) and scholars (Nord & Olsson, 2013), but the focus has shifted, and today, online communication and social media are frequent topics in research (Odén et al., 2016). What digital media is said to offer is an ability for agencies and bureaucrats to communicate directly with citizens and provide relevant and impartial information. Eriksson (2014a) also argues that digital media offer opportunities for situational adaptations and adjustments of messages to different platforms or target groups. They are also mobile and offer opportunities for prompt reactions, although there are notable limitations: the use of digital media in a crisis situation seems to be

higher among agencies and bureaucrats compared to the general public, even in a Nordic context where Internet penetration is relatively high (Eriksson & Olsson, 2016); agencies' messages seem to disappear in the steady stream of updates from other sources (Odén et al., 2016); and agencies have difficulty attracting followers outside the groups they reach in other ways (Olsson & Eriksson, 2016). The overall impression is, therefore, that agencies' focus on social media tends to amplify an already prominent line in society between those who get information and those who do not (Rasmusson & Ihlen, 2017).

Research beyond the techno-administrative approach is limited, and there are few attempts to develop theory or gain richer understandings of crisis communication as ideology, system, or practice. This is not characteristic of Nordic scholars nor for research on public agencies, but something typical for research on crisis communication in general. There are some notable examples of Nordic studies offering other perspectives; some have made calls for more creativity and improvisation, both in research and practice (Eriksson, 2014b; Falkheimer & Heide, 2010), whereas others have shown that we cannot expect too much as the (institutionalised) idea of crisis communication is strongly supported by conceptions of planning, organising, and routinising (Fredriksson, 2014; Fredriksson et al., 2014). The role of institutions is also evident in the work of Frandsen and Johansen (2009; see also Frandsen et al., 2016), who have been trying to understand the mobilising factors for crisis communication and how we can understand its condition when its emergency logic (represented by emergency officers) is challenged by a new crisis management logic (represented by communicators and managers). Others have shown that similar tensions are evident when agencies try to adapt to the logic of social media (Olsson & Eriksson, 2016), and that public agencies, due to their multi-professionality, are particularly exposed for internal tensions (Heide & Simonsson, 2015).

Conclusion

For bureaucrats involved in communication activities in one way or another, media management, reputation management, and crisis communication are interrelated and overlapping responsibilities and concerns. The day-to-day encounters with journalists are believed to be of certain relevance when public organisations are set to create and maintain their trust and reputation. In times of crisis, the importance of the two is enhanced, and agencies' performance during a major crisis can be seen as a test of their abilities to communicate in general and their ability to handle media in particular. It is also well known that agencies' abilities to uphold and secure autonomy is put to test during crisis, as ministers have a tendency to make political interventions in times of heavy media scrutiny (Kolltveit, 2019). At the same time, agencies' ability to

reach out during a major crisis builds on their already established reputation and trustworthiness in the existing networks and through existing channels.

Although highly interconnected in practice, these strands of literature (with their separate models, concepts, and references) have largely been three separate academic discussions (notable exceptions include Christensen & Læg Reid, 2015). Moreover, they tend to follow disciplinary divides – with journalism and media scholars contributing to mediatisation and media management discussions as well as research on crisis communication, whereas political scientists and organisation scholars tend to dominate the literature on bureaucratic reputation. These divides are by no means absolute, but it is evident that they have had consequences for the three strands of literature and contribute to some of their limitations.

One of the shortcomings is the media-centrism in journalism and media research on mediatisation (for critical discussions, see Figenschou et al., 2020; Fredriksson & Pallas, 2017). Here, developments in the media landscape are often used to explain changing communication regimes in public bureaucracies (both empirically and analytically), whereas non-media drivers to mediatisation have often been left unexplored (developments in the political system, structural changes in public bureaucracies, etc.). Another shortcoming is the tendency among reputation scholars to oversee media or to reduce it to a channel for communication or an arena for other actors involved in the reputational game. Developments in the media landscape and what consequences they have for agencies' interactions with their principals as well as other stakeholders are often set aside. Consequently, scholars disregard many of the contexts where the reputation of agencies is shaped, negotiated, or questioned. Research on crisis communication shows similar shortcomings. Even if media is a central theme in research, there is a strong tendency to handle it as a source providing information to different actors involved or affected by the crisis. There are studies of the interactions between journalists and bureaucrats and what the two groups think of each other; less is known, however, about how mediatisation affects crisis communication (for an analysis of this in terms of social media, see Olsson & Eriksson, 2016). In line with this, research on crisis communication tends to oversee the variety in motives for agencies to communicate throughout crises. Public information and how to get the message through have been a returning question, even if it is evident that communication in public administrations is mobilised by different principles and that reputation management often outdoes civic communication (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2016b).

To combine the knowledge research has gained in terms of media management, reputation management, and crisis communication, a first step would be to consolidate research on communication and public administration. With this, we would get much broader, but also detailed, knowledge about the motives, organising, content, and consequences of government agency communication.

In addition to this, there are other questions lacking answers, and from our point of view, future research would make an extensive contribution if it paid more attention to the following themes.

First, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis of the political, organisational, and democratic consequences of the professionalisation of communication in public bureaucracies. How does this affect policy-making processes, resource allocation, and prioritisation over time? One area that needs more investigation is if and how the ongoing professionalisation of communication contributes to and magnifies politicisation of public bureaucracies (Hustedt & Salomonsen, 2017; Thorbjørnsrud, 2015). The increased presence of ministerial advisors (special advisors, political advisors, or state secretaries) in Nordic government ministries has spurred a growing interest in politicisation of public bureaucracies (Christiansen et al., 2016; Hustedt et al., 2017); future research on how professionalisation of communication inside ministries – with an outspoken focus on strategic and proactive communication – impacts political processes requires more empirical emphasis. Newer studies indicate that the professionalisation of communication in Northern governments blurs the borders between different actors inside governments (Johansson & Nygren, 2019) and leads to more informal communication (off-the-record conversations, pitches, leaks, etc.) (see, e.g., Malling, 2019), and that the use of new digital platforms in particular alters the communication of public bureaucracies towards political promotion and campaigning (Brekke & Thorbjørnsrud, 2018), which are all trends that call for further analysis.

Second, more scholarly attention is needed pertaining to how the new hybrid, networked media landscape will impact on public sector communication. Citizens today raise questions, concerns, and complaints directly to government agencies and they expect quick, clear answers from public authorities (Canel & Luoma-aho, 2019). Moreover, interest groups and advocacy campaigns increasingly use social media to raise awareness for their causes; mobilise for policy change; and target responsible public authorities and politicians in government (Vromen, 2017). For public bureaucracies, networked media both amplify and intensify ongoing mediatisation processes and pose new opportunities and fundamental challenges related to format, speed, accessibility, and resources. Existing studies of the use of social media in Nordic government communication have raised a number of issues calling for future studies; the adaptation of social media has had an ad-hoc character resulting in hasty implementation (experimentation, poor guidelines, and unclear responsibilities), which evoke numerous ethical dilemmas and challenge the balance between political promotion and neutral, factual information (Brekke & Thorbjørnsrud, 2018; Johansson & Nygren, 2019; Olsson & Eriksson, 2016). Particularly, interactivity and real-time dialogue – which are stressed as key dimensions in building public trust as well as reputation (Canel & Luoma-aho, 2019) – are

perceived as complicated and resource-demanding by government agencies (Figenschou, 2019).

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