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Organizational and Individual response to hybridity in the public sector

A case study exploring the customer orientation of the Swedish Enforcement Authority

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Organizational and Individual response to hybridity in the public sector

A case study exploring the customer orientation
of the Swedish Enforcement Authority

HENRIK EDLUND | DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION



Organizational and Individual response to hybridity in the public sector

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A case study exploring the customer orientation of
the Swedish Enforcement Authority

Henrik Edlund



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Title and subtitle: Organizational and Individual response to hybridity in the public sector – A case study exploring the customer orientation of the Swedish Enforcement Authority			
Abstract <p>The aim of this study is to understand the response of public organizations and frontline public servants to the organizational hybridity that occurs when public organizations adopt market-inspired elements. To reach the aim I examine public sector customer orientation and how public organizations, as well as their employees, manage customer orientation, and the demands that the concept presents, alongside the demands traditionally presented to public organizations, and which motives and explanations that may be observed regarding how they manage these different demands. The study is conducted as a case study of the Swedish Enforcement Authority (SEA). The frontline public servants studied are the individuals employed at the frontline of the SEA's enforcement department - the enforcement officers.</p> <p>The organizational response to hybridity detected in the study is a procedure of emphasizing and downplaying different demands depending on context and topic. This way a public organization adopting market-inspired elements may avoid confrontations between competing demands, and between competing aspects of the demands of the market-inspired elements and the public setting, and may maintain an organizational identity as a functioning hybrid.</p> <p>On the individual level, this study indicates two main responses to hybridity; frontline public servants may respond to hybridity with compliance; supported by a hybrid professional identity the frontline public servants may form the demands of the market-inspired elements to the public setting, allowing them to comply with both the market-related demands and the traditional public sector demands. However, most frontline public servants hold on to a professional identity strictly based on the traditional values of public administration. As a result, many frontline public servants perceive that market-derived demands conflict with their view on their work and their duties and they respond to hybridity by ignoring or even resisting the market-related demands.</p> <p>Hence, the study shows that organizational hybridity in the public sector might appear easy when viewed from an organizational level, but more challenging when viewed from an individual level, as there are aspects of the hybridity that causes tensions among many of the individuals working at the frontline. Tensions that might be hidden under a calm organizational surface.</p>			
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A case study exploring the customer
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Henrik Edlund



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Henrik Edlund

Barkarby, 20th of October 2022

Table of Contents

- Preface 13**
- 1 Introduction 17**
 - 1.1 The marketization of the public sector..... 19
 - 1.2 Aim and research questions 24
 - 1.3 Outline of the dissertation..... 28
 - 1.4 Summary of Chapter 1 29
- 2 Research design 31**
 - 2.1 Philosophical stance and ethical considerations 31
 - 2.1.1 An ethnographic project..... 32
 - 2.1.2 Research ethics 35
 - 2.2 Methodological procedure 36
 - 2.2.1 A single case study analysed with the institutional logics perspective 37
 - 2.2.2 Document studies..... 39
 - 2.2.3 Interviews 41
 - 2.2.4 Observations 43
 - 2.2.5 The process of analysing the data 44
 - 2.3 Evaluating the research..... 45
 - 2.4 Summary of Chapter 2..... 46
- 3 From bureaucracies to customer oriented organizations – a literature review..... 49**
 - 3.1 A movement from “bureaucracy” to “entrepreneurialism” 49
 - 3.1.1 Bureaucracy 52
 - 3.1.2 Entrepreneurialism..... 54
 - 3.2 The concept of organizational hybridity 57
 - 3.2.1 Organizational response to hybridity 59
 - 3.2.2 Individual response to hybridity 61

3.2.3	The interplay between the organizational- and individual level	62
3.3	The concept of customer orientation.....	63
3.3.1	The customer orientation of public organizations	65
3.3.2	Opposition and objections against public sector customer orientation	74
3.3.3	Earlier empirical examinations of the customer orientation of public organizations	76
3.4	Summary of Chapter 3	85
4	The institutional logics perspective.....	89
4.1	The origin of the perspective	90
4.2	The conceptual structure of the perspective.....	91
4.2.1	How institutional logics influence individuals	93
4.3	The concept of institutional complexity	94
4.4	Analysing the data with the institutional logics perspective....	99
4.5	Summary of Chapter 4.....	101
5	Hybridity at the SEA: An organizational perspective	103
5.1	The case organization: The Swedish Enforcement Authority (SEA)	105
5.2	The Customer orientation of the SEA.....	107
5.2.1	To re-characterize the clients into “customers”	110
5.2.2	To be responsive to the customers and their needs... ..	113
5.2.3	To create value.....	117
5.2.4	To adjust the customers	118
5.3	The principles coexisting with customer orientation	120
5.3.1	A principle of legality	120
5.3.2	A principle of objectivity	122
5.3.3	A principle of strict procedures	123
5.3.4	A principle of efficiency	125
5.3.5	Brand orientation	126
5.4	Discussion.....	129
6	Hybridity at the SEA: A frontline perspective	137
6.1	A frontline perspective on the customer orientation of the SEA	138
6.1.1	The enforcement officers and the notion of “customers”	142

6.1.2	The demands of customer orientation from a frontline perspective.....	149
6.2	Working in an environment of multiple principles: conflicting demands.....	157
6.3	Additional frontline reactions to hybridity	162
6.3.1	The priority of legal and procedural demands	163
6.3.2	The jokes and dismissals.....	165
6.3.3	The feeling of a growing organizational gap	168
6.4	Discussion.....	171
7	An analysis of the hybridity of the SEA	175
7.1	The institutional complexity of the SEA	175
7.1.1	How the organization reacts to institutional complexity	180
7.1.2	How the individuals at the frontline react to institutional complexity	181
7.1.3	The interplay between the organizational and individual level	185
7.2	The hybridity of the SEA: easy or challenging – a matter of perspective.....	187
7.3	Discussion.....	191
8	Results, Conclusions and Contributions	195
8.1	Results.....	196
8.2	Conclusions.....	199
8.3	Contributions	205
8.4	Some recommendations to the SEA	208
8.5	From entrepreneurial public management to a hybrid management?.....	211
8.6	Suggestions for future research.....	212
	Afterword	215
	References	217

Preface

The Swedish Enforcement Authority (SEA) is a public organization that by the Swedish government has been assigned to secure the funding of the public sector, and to “maintain a high societal willingness to pay” (SFS 2016: 1333). One of the main missions of the organization is to collect public as well as private debts. In popular culture the SEA is often portrayed as harsh and authoritarian, and there are several examples in films and literature where the organization, or an employee of the organization, serves as a representative of a relentless and/or reckless kind of government control¹. The organization may also be said to have a reputation for being somewhat intimidating, and when people describe their encounter with the organization they often describe it in terms of being distressing. As when a famous writer described the experience of receiving a letter from the organization; he then portrayed it as “horrifying”, and he depicted how only the sight of the envelope on his doormat caused him to end up in a state of chock that prevented him from opening the letter for several hours².

The fact that being a client of the SEA might be related to a state of economic predicament and thus also associated with shame, has probably contributed to the establishment of the organization’s reputation. To end up in the organization’s records is sometimes even seen as a sign of personal decline, not least the “bad mark” this leaves in a person’s public credit information, a mark that considerably worsens a person’s chance of getting a loan or to purchase something in instalments. Another factor that has established the SEA’s reputation is perhaps the authoritarian legacy embedded in the organization’s Swedish name. The organization’s official Swedish name is Kronofogdemyndigheten, literally translated the first part of the name,

1 See for instance the crime novel “Livet deluxe” (Lapidus 2011) where the SEA’s logo is said to be feared by almost all Swedes, and the TV-series “We got this” (Eklund 2020) where the main character is hunted by a harsh (and rather slimy) officer from the SEA.

2 Schulman & Eklund (2013: episode 44).

“kronofogde”, means “the crown’s bailiff”, while “myndighet” is the Swedish term for “authority”. The organization’s name is accordingly reminiscent of the local bailiffs and tax-men that maintained the rule of the country when Sweden was governed by authoritarian monarchs³. Moreover, the organization’s reputation is most likely affected by the extensive coercive powers that the organization is entitled to use to fulfil its missions, and the organization, and its employees, are often recognized as the ones that would come to seize your belongings in case you would end up in debt.

In 2009 I, the author of this dissertation, was hired by the SEA as an aspiring enforcement officer. I can still recall my first day at the organization, the anxious steps up to the entrance hall of this, as I felt it, very serious workplace⁴. Up to that day I had mostly been working in business organizations, organizations that had a focus on sales and profitability. At the SEA the main focus rather was set on laws and internal procedures. What also distinguished the SEA from my earlier workplaces was the toolbox of coercive measures available to the organization and its employees. Soon I came to notice that a common topic of conversation among my new colleagues was the many challenging situations that might arise in relation to these coercive measures. The most palpable coercive measure that an enforcement officer has to take is probably the enforcement of a decision that a person has to be evicted from his/her home. It could be argued that this is one of the most radical coercive measures that a Swedish public servant must perform. Briefly described it is a procedure conducted by two enforcement officers, sometimes in the company of a locksmith (and when needed in assistance with the police). The officers knock on the door and in case someone is located in the apartment (or the premises) this person is forced to leave; the lock is being replaced and within a couple of days the apartment is emptied and the key is handed over to the landlord. The enforcement officers also have the legal right to enter closed spaces to search for assets in the premises of a person in debt, and an enforcement officer suspecting that assets may be hidden in a home may use coercive measures to enter the home, unlike a police officer that needs a decision from a prosecutor to enter someone’s home.

³ See for instance Westerhult (1965); Frohnert (1993) and SOU 2003:97 (p. 107-108).

⁴ As it later turned out this feeling was also shared with a colleague who later came to tell me that he almost instinctively, when entering the office during his first day, removed the briefcase that was hanging from a strap on his shoulder and instead grabbed it in his hand as he thought that this way of carrying a briefcase was more suiting “a true and serious bureaucrat”.

But, neither the focus on laws and internal procedures, nor the toolbox of coercive measures really surprised me when I started my employment at the SEA, on the contrary these were aspects that I reckoned would be a part of an organization such as the SEA. Something that, however, did surprise me was how the SEA, in its internal communication, constantly underscored that it was aiming to be “customer oriented”, and how the organization continuously was referring to its clients as “customers”.

Based on my earlier experience of customer relations in the business sector I felt that statements about giving “customer service” somehow seemed difficult to fit into the environment and the context that the SEA operated in. I had formerly, for instance, been working at the customer service of a telecommunication company, a workplace characterized by customer relations guided by distinct business demands: give the customer good service to generate upsell (and thereby earn more commission). The relations that one had with the clients of the SEA were of a completely different, and in many ways much more complex, character. Bound by legal requirements one sometimes was stuck in a deadlock between, a “customer’s” requests and law and regulations (unlike in the telecommunication company where the rules often were bent to satisfy the customer). At the same time, I also felt that an increased service focus could be positive for this organization, as it sometimes felt a bit “bureaucratic” (in the terms most negative sense). Moreover, the organization’s reputation as a rather harsh debt collector sometimes seemed to prevent contact with the clients in cases that best would be solved with cooperation rather than by coercion. Perhaps management was on to something when orienting the organization towards its “customers” and trying to be a bit more “customer friendly”?

It was on this background that I started to ask myself: what happens when a public organization, such as the SEA, claims to be customer oriented, how does such an organization and, not at least its staff, the public servants, manage an approach so clearly associated with the business sector in this environment of legal demands? This question continued to puzzle me until one day when the SEA searched for employees that were interested in applying for a research project, and I saw the chance to profoundly explore this question from inside the organization.

1 Introduction

It has become increasingly common for organizations to adopt elements, such as structures, approaches or strategies, that are usually associated with organizations from other sectors (e.g. Styhre 2002: 179; Christensen, Lægreid, Roness & Rovik 2005: 14-15). Not least, it has become common among public organizations that now often gaze towards the market sector and adopt market- and business-inspired elements (e.g. Hood 1991; Pollit & Bouckaert 2011: 9-11; Christensen & Lægreid 2011: 407; Slater & Tonkiss 2001: 137-141). The situation when organizations adopt elements from another sector may be considered as *organizational hybridity*, a concept indicating an organizational mix of “two or more elements normally found separately” (Miller, Kurunmäki & O’Leary 2008: 943), or a combination of “sectoral, legal, structural, and/or mission-related elements” (Smith 2010: 220). Scholars often underscore that organizational hybridity implicates an exposure to multiple pressures in the form of demands derived from different sectors, demands that might be experienced as incompatible or even competing (e.g., Pache & Santos 2013: 972), and that this might be challenging, both for the organizations (e.g., Alexius & Furusten 2019b: 11-14; Brandsen & Karré 2011: 828-831) and for the employees, the individuals working in the organizations (e.g., Bévort & Suddaby 2016: 19-21; Reissner 2019: 50).

The fact that many public organizations hybridize by adopting market-inspired elements accordingly raises the question of how public organizations, and not least their employees, the public servants, are managing the demands that market-inspired elements present, in a public setting and alongside the traditional demands of public administration. This is the issue that is addressed in this dissertation. In other words, the study explores organizational and individual response to hybridity in the public sector.

Organizational hybridity is a concept that has attracted an increased interest in the last decade (Segnestam Larsson & Wollter 2021: 1). As it has become common among public organizations to adopt elements from the market sector, scholars have also taken an interest in hybridity in the public setting (e.g. Bjerregaard 2011; Meyer, Egger, Höllerer & Hammerschmid 2014; Buffat 2014; Fossetöl et al. 2015). Still, it is frequently claimed that hybridity and its

outcomes should be more profoundly studied in public organizations (e.g., Denis, Ferlie & Van Gestel 2015: 284-286; Nordstrand Berg & Pinheiro 2016: 163). Moreover, scholars often call for studies of organizational hybridity on multiple levels (Reissner 2019: 49; Bévort & Suddaby 2016: 18). How organizations and individuals respond to hybridity has only in a few cases been studied simultaneously within the same organization(s), and the knowledge about the interplay and implications of hybridity on both organizational and individual level within the same organization, remains limited (Reissner 2019: 48-49).

When I, in this study, explore the individual response to hybridity I focus on public servants employed at the organizational frontline⁵. The frontline workers are the ones who must face the daily outcomes of organizational hybridity, still the amount of literature that has taken an extensive frontline exploration of the concept within public settings is rather scarce. In other words, there is still much to explore about how frontline public servants in their daily work experience market-inspired elements, and how they manage market-related demands in a public setting⁶. The introduction of market-inspired elements in public organizations also generally seems to have been driven by top managers (Statskontoret 2015a: 122), while the attitude towards these elements among frontline public servants appears to be more ambivalent (e.g., Rosenthal & Peccei 2006).

Customer orientation is an organizational approach that primarily has been associated with market organizations, but now this approach also is frequently implemented into the strategies and policies of public organizations. A common idea about customer orientation is that it is an approach stating how staff should relate to its customers and that it is prescribing a behaviour of entirely obeying the customers and their wishes, hence the expression “the customer is always right”. When looking into the business literature customer orientation is often described with catchy slogans such as “putting customers first” or “staying close to the customers” (e.g., Peters & Waterman 1982),

5 The frontline of an organization is here defined as the part of the organization that to a more or less great extent is handling client relations. A frontline employee is thus considered to be an employee who in her/his line of work deals directly with clients. A “frontline public servant” may thus be defined analogous to a “street-level bureaucrat” defined by Lipsky (1980/2010) as a public employee that frequently interacts with citizens, and whose decisions might have a big impact on citizens’ lives.

6 Moreover, as Bayley (2008) states concerning the importance of taking into consideration street-level practitioners’ view on social phenomena (in his case street-level police officers): they have “...more first-hand knowledge of the pathologies of modern societies than battalions of sociologists” (p.13).

while the marketing literature often describes it as a principle stating that the organization and its employees should aim to be more responsive to the customers and their needs, this to achieve market advantages (e.g., Levitt 2008/1960; Kohli & Jaworski 1990).

It might thus, based on how customer orientation is associated with business settings and for-profit market organizations, seem puzzling that public organizations nowadays also frequently assert to be (or at least strive to be) customer oriented, and the demands of customer orientation, to focus on the customers and the customers' needs, may appear as incompatible, even competing, with the traditional demands imposed on public organizations, such as legal security and objectivity. Nevertheless, there are several examples of public organizations with diverse public missions, organizations such as welfare organizations, hospitals and even tax authorities and police organizations, that today claim to be orienting their activities towards their "customers". The adoption of customer orientation may thus be considered as a common way that public organization hybridize, and the customer orientation of public organizations is in this study constituting the empirical phenomenon I study to explore hybridity.

1.1 The marketization of the public sector

Organizational hybridity has, as mentioned, become increasingly common among public organizations as the public sectors of primarily Western societies have gone through a "marketization", which includes the introduction of market approaches and strategies into "the organization and conduct of government" (Slater & Tonkiss 2001: 140). In case market and public organizations did not differ at all then there would be no reason to assume that market-inspired approaches would be more complex to manage for public organizations and their employees than for the organizations and employees of the market sector. Hence, the basic assumption of this dissertation is that there are differences between the organizations of the market and the organizations of the public sector. However, even if there are characteristics that distinguish public organizations from market organizations it is also important to acknowledge the many similarities, for as stated by Boyne (2002), if public and market organizations were fundamentally different then the concept of importing market ideas to the public sector could be immediately dismissed as "...at best fruitless and at worst counterproductive" (p. 98). Market-inspired reforms of public organizations are often built on the idea that the differences

between public and market organizations might be dismissed as “stereotypes”, and that size or technological advancement distinguish organizations more than sector affiliation (Christensen et al. 2005: 14-15).

There are three distinctive characteristics that often are accentuated when comparing public organizations with market organizations (Boyne 2002: 98-99):

- Ownership - public organizations are publicly “owned” by members of the community, unlike market organizations which are owned by entrepreneurs or shareholders
- Funding - public organizations are (most often) funded by taxes, not by paying customers
- Control - political forces control public organizations while market forces control market organizations

Often it is also accentuated that public organizations must take in other, and a much broader set of, considerations than market organizations, considerations that must be balanced against each other: democratic considerations; considerations of legal security; considerations of the public good, whereas market organizations primarily may focus on economic considerations (Christensen et al. 2005: 13-16). Besides, public organizations are also, unlike market organizations, responsible to all citizens, not just to specific groups of stakeholders. Public organizations are also required to be transparent and to act predictable⁷.

It is frequently claimed that the differences between the market and the public setting leads to that public organizations must be guided by other sets of principles than the organizations of the market. The Swedish Agency for Public Management has acknowledged six principles that ought to permeate all Swedish public organizations (Statskontoret 2019). According to the agency Swedish public entities should, first of all, be guided by a principle of *democracy*. They should also be permeated by a principle the agency has entitled *legality*, this is a principle stating that the activities of public entities must be supported by the law and that the employees of public organizations always must comprehend, and follow, the law. A principle of *objectivity*, implying that all citizens must be equally treated, also must guide the work of the public organizations, just like principles of *freedom of opinion* and *respect*.

⁷ It should be underscored that there also are a wide range of different kinds of public organizations as public activity ranges from public transport to health care and criminal justice.

Finally, the agency underscores that a principle of *efficiency and service*, ensuring that public entities must make sure that their contacts with the citizens ought to be smooth and easy, also must direct the work of public organizations.

But, as mentioned, there has been a tendency in public management to somehow blur the differences between the sectors, and more public organizations have started to take inspiration from the market. This tendency is often linked to a broader reform movement that has swept over the public sectors of primarily the Western world. When describing this reform movement, one often begins in the mid-seventies when the “old certainties of the welfare state came under attack” from essentially neo-liberalism, a political mentality which saw “big government” as inefficient and way too “bureaucratic”⁸ (Miller & Rose 2008: 79-84). Neo-liberalism then introduced the language of entrepreneurialism⁹ into public management and emphasized how government, instead of being “...an extended and bureaucratically apparatus for social administration” (Miller & Rose 2008: 71-72), should be restructured “...according to a particular image of the economic – the market” (Miller & Rose 2008: 97). Following these ideas new forms of managing public organizations were introduced, forms modelled upon an image of market sector management, including new relations between the organizations and their clients, and between the public servants and the citizens, relations defined in market terms.

One of the first to describe this reform movement was Hood (1991) as he coined the now famous phrase “New Public Management” (NPM). Hood meant that NPM was a reform-movement built on a stress on market management ideas¹⁰. He argued that this new way of managing public

⁸ However, the critique against big government came according to Miller and Rose (2008) from all parts of the political spectrum, only framed in different ways: “...from the left in terms of the ‘fiscal crises of the State’ and from the right in terms of the contradiction between the growth of an ‘unproductive’ welfare sector that created no wealth at the expense of the ‘productive’ private sector...” (p.210).

⁹ A language of entrepreneurialism implies a market-influenced language that for instance holds that success is achieved only through satisfaction of the customers (du Gay & Salaman 1992). More about entrepreneurialism and the entrepreneurial way of managing public organization in Chapter 3.

¹⁰ It should be noted that it often is accentuated that NPM is a broad label, a fact not least underscored by Hood himself when he is stating that NPM is a label “...for a general, though certainly not universal, shift in public management styles” (Hood 1995: 94). That NPM is a broad label has also been underlined by for instance Pollitt, Van Thiel, and Homburg (2007: 4) as they examine the different manifestations of NPM: “NPM is not a coherent set of ideas and tools. The labels may be the same, but the underlying story differs all the time”.

organizations stood in sharp contrast to the more traditional way, as it implied that public organizations ought to be organized in a way that would increase (economic) efficiency, while public organizations conventionally, first of all, had been organized to prevent favouritism and corruption (Hyndman & Liguori 2016). Hood (1995) also showed how this reform movement implied a shift in focus from a focus on how things are done to a focus on output, i.e., towards an increased use of performance measurements and greater attention to “production”.

Pollit and Bouckaert (2011) are two of the many scholars who have followed the trail of Hood as they have tried to analyse and categorize the NPM-reform movement. They consider it a two-level reform: at a theoretical level they described it as centred on the idea of improving the public sector with the help of market- and business concepts; at a practical (“more mundane”) level they describe it as a collection of practices such as measurements of outputs, performance-related pay, outsourcing, and quality improvement techniques (for example Total Quality Management, TQM). The practical level they claim also to include “treating the clients as customers”. Customer orientation and the idea of considering the citizens as *customers* are actually often in focus when researchers are scrutinising NPM-related reforms. For instance, Evetts (2009) claims that NPM has transformed the relationships between public servants and citizens into “customer relations” and Aberbach and Christensen (2005) have described the tendency to define citizens as customers (or as consumers) as an “NPM-dilemma”.

Pollit and Bouckaert also categorize the NPM-reform by its regional characteristics and Sweden is then placed in a category they call “The Neo-Weberian State” (NWS)¹¹. NWS might, according to their categorization, be considered as a light version of NPM. The public sector is within this category modernised to become more efficient and responsive to citizens by taking inspiration from business methods, yet the public sector remains a sector separated from the market with its unique set of rules and types of methods. Or as Pollit and Bouckaert explain the NWS-principle: “Yes, the state apparatus requires modernization, but no, the world of business does not hold all the answers. Traditional bureaucracy has virtues which should be preserved” (Pollit & Bouckaert 2011: 23).

¹¹ Pollit and Bouckaert present four models; “The New Public Management”, “The Neo-Weberian State”, “Networks” (making government better through self-organising networks) and “The New Public Governance” (making government more effective by including a wide range of social actors in policymaking and implementation). It should be emphasized that Pollit and Bouckaert state that one never can point to a single country and say that this is a typical example of one of those models.

The NPM-reform has been subjected to extensive criticism, not least for its mimicry of the business sector and its use of private management strategies (e.g., Lapsley 2009; Walker et al. 2011 and numerous debate articles in various media channels¹²). The NPM-reform is sometimes also accused of being counterproductive and rather than decreasing paperwork and “bureaucracy” leading to an increased administration due to the reform’s focus on measurement and regulation (Sturdy, Wright & Wylie 2016). When Hood and Dixon (2015) take a broad grip on the NPM-era they conclude that 30 years of NPM only seems to have resulted in governments that “work a bit worse and cost a bit more”, and they argue that NPM neither has been as successful as has been claimed by the NPM-enthusiasts, nor as devastating as suggested by the NPM-critics. Slater and Tonkis (2001) on their part conclude that the market-inspired reforms have been highly variable and often rather weak: “sometimes involving little more than a rhetoric of efficiency or added value” (p. 141).

Today it is sometimes claimed that we live in a “post-NPM” era and that public management now has taken a step away from the typical characteristics of New Public Management (e.g., Christensen & Lægreid 2008). However, Hyndman and Lapsley (2016) claim that “the story of NPM continues”, and not only continues, but that it even has increased in relevance in the wake of the global financial crisis of the first decade of the 20th century. Assertions that NPM has been replaced by a new style of public management (like for instance “New Public Governance”, NPG) are also dismissed by Hyndman and Liguori (2016) as they argue that NPM (together with some elements of NPG) still slowly is replacing the traditional public management style, even though the styles also to some degree coexist. And, as Pollit and Bouckaert conclude, adding to the complexity is the fact that even in case a new management model is emerging it is unlikely that it will entirely replace the old one: “In public management reform, new brooms hardly ever sweep entirely clean. Rather they shift some of the dust away but then deposit new dust on top of remaining traces of the old” (Pollit & Bouckaert 2011: 12).

Accordingly, it is likely that NPM and its market-inspiration, in some form, will continue to influence public organizations. Some public organizations

¹² NPM is today applied to describe all kinds of market-inspired or market-like reforms. Sometimes the concept is even linked to all sorts of changes that imply an increased performance measurement, even outside of public management. For instance when a Swedish sports journalist during the 2019 Women’s World Cup in football wrote an article about his dislike of VAR (Video Assistant Referee), and he argued that the use of video reviews implied that “New Public Management now has entered into the football fields” (Bank 2019, 27th of June).

will, therefore, continue to adopt elements from the world of business, and as a consequence, these organizations, as well as their employees, will have to continue to cope with market-related demands, while also still having to handle the demands traditionally imposed on public organizations. Which leads us to the aim of this research study.

1.2 Aim and research questions

The aim of this study is to understand the response of public organizations and their employees, the public servants working on the frontline of the organizations, to the seemingly competing demands that they are exposed to as a result of the hybridity that occurs when public organizations adopt market-inspired elements. Hence, the study approaches both the entire organizations, as well as the individuals working on the frontline to explore the response at a strategic- as well as an operational level. The aim is to answer *how* public organizations and frontline public servants respond to hybridity, as well as *why* they respond to hybridity the way they do. The aim is achieved by examining public sector customer orientation. Hence, the study examines how public organizations, as well as their frontline employees, manage customer orientation and the demands that the concept presents, alongside the demands traditionally presented to public organizations, and which motives and explanations that may be observed regarding how they manage these different demands.

The aim with the study may be summed up with the following line:

To understand the response of public organizations and frontline public servants to organizational hybridity.

The aim is achieved by answering the following research questions:

1. How is customer orientation manifested and described by public organizations and what demands do public organizations consider that customer orientation presents?
2. How do public organizations manage the demands of customer orientation, alongside the other demands presented to public organizations, and what motives and explanations can be observed for how they manage this multiplicity of demands?
3. How do frontline public servants understand customer orientation when applied in public management?
4. How do frontline public servants manage the demands of customer orientation, alongside the other demands presented to them in the public setting and what motives and explanations can be observed for how they manage this multiplicity of demands?

By answering the above questions, I will (1) find out how public organizations understand customer orientation and what demands that public organizations consider to be embedded in customer orientation. I will also (2) find out how public organizations manage customer orientation and its intrinsic demands in a public setting alongside the other (more traditional) demands presented to public organizations, and why they manage this multiplicity of demands the way they do. By answering the above questions, I will also (3) be able to say how frontline public servants interpret customer orientation and what demands they believe that it imposes on them and (4) how frontline public servants manage the coexistence of the demands of customer orientation and the other (more traditional) demands of the public setting, and why they manage the multiplicity of demands the way they do.

Accordingly, by answering questions number (1), and (2) I will be able to reach the aim of understanding the response of public organizations to organizational hybridity, while questions number (3), and (4) will aid me to reach my aim of understanding the response of frontline public servants to organizational hybridity.

The study is conducted as a close examination of a specific case, the case of the Swedish Enforcement Authority (SEA). The SEA is a public organization administrated by the Swedish state and the organization is mainly recognized

for its mission to collect public as well as private debts. The SEA is well-suited as a case organization as it has adopted the market-inspired concept of customer orientation as a prioritized organizational approach. A fact that makes the case of the SEA especially interesting, and perhaps might be described as deviant or even extreme, is that the SEA may be categorized as a *coercive public organization*, i.e., the SEA is a public organization that sometimes must take coercive measures towards its clients, something that further increases the potential conflicts inherent in the hybridity of the customer orientation of the organization. To understand the response of public servants to hybridity I will study the professionals entitled enforcement officers, the frontline workers of the enforcement department of the SEA. While conducting this research project I am myself employed as an enforcement officer at the SEA, something that have methodological implications, a circumstance that I will return to in the next chapter (when presenting the research design).

The generalizability of case studies is sometimes disputed, however, it is my aim that the results will contribute beyond merely the specific case studied. For instance, I hope to contribute to the emergent concept of organizational hybridity. Exploring organizational hybridity in a detailed case study may add significantly to our capacity to understand and explain how organizations and individuals within the public sector respond to hybridity, why they respond as they do, and what consequences the hybridity might result in for the organizations as well as for the employees. As this study focuses on the organizational- as well as the individual-level the results also may contribute to our knowledge about the interplay between the levels. The study of organizational hybridity is interesting, from both an academic as well as from a practical point of view, it offers an opportunity for generating managerial advice, as well as it is highlighting consequences, risks and possibilities for the organizations, their relationship with employees, clients and other stakeholders.

I also hope to contribute with an increased knowledge about the outcomes of adopting customer orientation in public management. The idea to customer orient public organizations, including the idea to treat and regard the citizens as “customers”, constitutes a topic for frequent debate and is including enthusiasts (e.g., Osborne & Gaebler 1992) as well as skeptics (e.g., Fountain 2001). It is a topic sometimes addressed by politicians¹³ and occasionally

¹³ In 2014 a parliamentary bill was submitted to the Swedish Parliament with the headline “The abolition of the customer notion” (Motion 2014/15: 960) and in 2018 another parliamentary bill suggested that the parliament would decide to prohibit the use of the customer notion in government authorities (Motion 2017/18: 2666). In the latter bill the

evaluated in public reports¹⁴. Earlier empirical academic research dealing with the topic is ambiguous, sometimes indicating that customer orientation might be an effective turn-around strategy for public organizations that have been considered rigid and unresponsive (e.g., Drummond, Ensor, Laing & Richardson 2000), at other times warning that it just might end up as nothing more than a “management exercise” without any actual effect for the public organizations or their clients (e.g., Cheung 2005). Scholars are also undetermined about how public servants react to customer orientation, sometimes suggesting that public employees are hesitant, or even reluctant (Rosenthal & Peccei 2006; Needham 2006), while others conclude that the attitude towards customer orientation significantly differs between management and frontline employees (Whelan et al. 2010; Clarke et al. 2007). There are also studies indicating that customer orientation has positive effects on public employees’ performance and motivation (Paarlberg 2007).

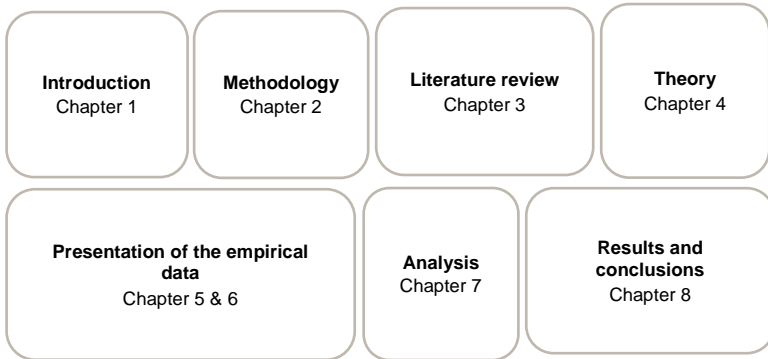
The study may also be seen as another post in the debate about the “marketization” of the public sector, providing a close-up micro-level example of what market-inspired reforms might result in. Concerns exist about the application of market-inspired ideas into the management of public organizations (e.g., Fountain 2001; Walker et al. 2011), but few empirical examinations explore how these ideas affect the public servants on “street-level”. How do they handle these ideas during their daily work and how do they respond to the possible incompatible and competing demands of public management and market-inspired ideas?

Besides the above mentioned contributions I also hope that the study creates value for the SEA and the organization’s strive to prevent over-indebtedness. By developing a better understanding of what happens when market-inspired ideas are applied in public organizations, new ideas, strategies, and work methods may be established that may help the organization to reach its objectives. This is also, in the longer term, of importance to society in general as over-indebtedness has been recognized as an individual as well as a societal problem (see e.g., Savemark 2011; Sandvall 2011).

customer notion is considered as a sign of “the market’s intrusion into public activities” and consequently the authors suggest that the customer notion should be eliminated for other terms. Representatives for the Social Democratic Party submitted both bills. Both bills were rejected by the parliament (See also Konstitutionsutskottet 2017).

¹⁴ In 2015 The Swedish Agency for Public Management (Statskontoret) stated that the customer orientation of public organizations perhaps might lead to better service for the citizens but that an “overly strong focus on customer orientation” also might result in a lack of justice (Statskontoret 2015b: 4-5).

1.3 Outline of the dissertation



In Chapter 1 – *“Introduction”* – I introduce the reader to subjects of interest and to the concept of organizational hybridity. The fact that organizational hybridity has increased in public management as a result of a reform movement (NPM) is presented and I also introduce the aim and the research questions that I will answer in this dissertation. Finally, I write about my thoughts on the overall contributions this dissertation may give.

In chapter 2 – *“Research Design”* – I present both the philosophical and the methodological approaches of the study. I describe the ethnographic approach and what implications it has for the study. I also describe the methods applied in this study, both generally as well as specifically.

In chapter 3 – *“From bureaucracies to customer oriented organizations – a literature review”* – I explore the relevant literature from three point of views. I begin with a presentation of how the adoption of market-inspired elements such as customer orientation, might be described as the result of a change in modes of managing public organizations; from “bureaucracy” towards “entrepreneurialism”. A movement that could be said to have paved the way for organizational hybridity within public management. I then present the concept of organizational hybridity prior to exploring customer orientation and how it has been described within the marketing literature as well as in the literature within the field of public management.

In chapter 4 – *“The institutional logics perspective”* – I present the theory that will support both my analysis of the case studied and the finding of answers to the defined research questions. The theory is called the institutional

logics perspective. I present the theoretical perspective's origin, its structure and how it has been applied in research.

Chapter 5 and 6 constitute the empirical chapters. In chapter 5 – “*Hybridity at the SEA: an organizational perspective*” –the focus is on the organizational level and the chapter thus present the empirical content that I will analyse to answer research questions number 1 and 2. As mentioned, the starting point of this study is that the case organization, the SEA, has taken inspiration from the market sector by adopting customer orientation and that this process constitutes a case of organizational hybridity. Thus, I begin this chapter by presenting how customer orientation is described and manifested at the SEA. This also allows me to understand what demands that customer orientation presents to the organization and its employees. Then I present what other guiding rules, or principles that can be detectable in the internal communication of the SEA and the demands that are embedded in these principles. In chapter 6 – “*Hybridity at the SEA: a frontline perspective*” –I shift focus to understand how the frontline employees of the SEA understand the organization's customer orientation and how they manage customer orientation in this public setting. This chapter thus presents the empirical content that I will analyze to answer research questions number 3 and 4.

In chapter 7 – “*An analysis of the hybridity of the SEA*” – the case of the SEA is analyzed and explored using the the institutional logics perspective.

In chapter 8 – “*Results, Conclusions and Contributions*” – I answer the research questions, summarize my conclusions and clarify which contributions that I suggest this study can give to theory as well as to practical implementation. I also explicate some final reflexions based on my work with this study.

1.4 Summary of Chapter 1

This chapter began with a brief presentation of the topic of this study: how public organizations more frequently have begun to adopt market-inspired elements, and that this situation may be considered as *organizational hybridity*. It was furthermore explained that the aim of the study is to specifically understand how public organizations as well as individuals working at the frontline of public organizations respond to hybridity. The chapter then continued with a description of how public organizations differ from market organization, both in structure and in regard to which principles that guides the organizations. Then briefly, the reform movement that have paved way for

public sector hybridity was depicted. This reform movement often labelled as New Public Management have led to the use of values, principles and logics inspired by the market within public management. Next, the aim of the study was explicated and the research questions was presented. I also described how I hope to contribute, both academically and practically with this study. Finally, the chapter ended with an outline of the dissertation.

2 Research design

According to Punch (2006: 47-48) the research design should be the research project's link between the research questions and the data, whereas Bryman and Bell (2007), for their part, consider that the research design should be "...a framework for the generation of evidence that is suited both to a certain set of criteria and to the research question in which the investigator is interested" (p. 39). Denzin and Lincoln (2000: 22) suggest that the research design should be "a flexible set of guidelines" that positions the researcher in the empirical world, while Watson (1994) says that the research design should answer four questions: What? Why? How (theoretically)? and How (practically)? One could, in other words, say that the research design should form some kind of basic methodological plan linked to, and suitable for answering, the research questions.

In this chapter I will present the research design of this study. This study has been conducted as a close examination of a single case, and the empirical methods that I have applied have been document analysis, in-depth interviews and observations. Before I go into detail about my practical methodological trail, I will unravel my philosophical stance and what ethical considerations I have made.

2.1 Philosophical stance and ethical considerations

All research projects contain elements of quantitative as well as qualitative thinking, but most research projects can be categorized as being either quantitative or qualitative. This research project can be categorized as qualitative as it is characterized by an aim to generate an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. Similar to other qualitative research I have had, when conducting this research project, an interpretive approach. The interpretive approach indicates that the research results have been built on my interpretations, rather than being based on regularities or statistical measurements (Rosenberg 2012: 25-30). The sociologist Johan Asplund

(1971) has described the work of the interpretive researcher and I have been inspired by his reflections about the approach. He states that when conducting interpretive research one must continuously ask oneself: “what does this actually mean?”, and twist and turn the phenomenon studied, and try to interpret it from many point of views. Rosenberg (2012: 119) adds that conducting interpretive research can be compared to deciphering a text, and he states that deciphering a text requires that we understand the language spoken. Moreover, Rosenberg proclaims that: “...for interpretationalist social scientists, the philosophy of language is as important as the study of differential equations is for physicists” (p. 134), and language has, not just in figurative terms, a central position in this project. Just the simple notion of “customers” when applied within public management renders so much debate that it has been impossible not to let language play a part in the study. Being an employee of the organization that I also study, I understand the language spoken on the inside. Accordingly I mean that I, as an insider, are better positioned than an “outsider” to analyse and understand the case studied (I will return to the fact that I am an insider in the organization I study, and its philosophical and methodological impacts later on).

Another aspect of interpretive research that Rosenberg (2012) emphasizes, and that I also find important to underscore, is that it cannot be said to be totally value free. Nagel (1979) also agrees with this and states that “...value commitments enter into the very assessment of evidence by social scientists, and not simply into the content of the conclusions they advance” (p. 578-579). I would like to emphasize that it is my interpretations of the empirical data that are presented in this study, and thus they are inevitably influenced by my values. Likewise, it is also important to underscore that I have strived to do my research without bias or prejudice, to the best of my ability. Finally, it has also been important for me to describe and analyse the case in such a way that the reader may individually interpret and draw his/her own conclusions.

2.1.1 An ethnographic project

Alvesson (2009) has come up with the expression “at-home ethnography”, to describe a research tactic that takes advantage of the fact that the researcher works or lives in the setting where s/he is doing research. Alvesson considers that PhD-students who combine work and research have an excellent opportunity to apply this kind of research tactic. Early on I understood that the ethnographic approach would fit my purpose as well as the situation that I was in – as I was employed by the organization on which I also was doing research. Ethnography originates from social anthropology, a research tactic that aims at

describing the lives and cultures of exotic tribal societies by living with the natives. The ethnographic approach is based on the idea that nothing can be understood outside its context, and the researcher must therefore spend a considerable time on site, living side by side with the “natives”. The ethnographic researcher emphasizes the ordinary, the everyday events, and how the members of the group/culture/organization etc. experience their reality (Denscombe 2009: 84-85).

Geertz (1983) highlights the creation of a “thick description” as an important characteristic of ethnographic research, something he describes as a rich, detailed, and specific depiction of the researcher’s experiences from the field. The reader should experience it almost as if s/he had been there as well¹⁵. Other characteristics of an ethnographic approach are according to Geertz that the findings should be considered as particular; they are “another country heard from”. However, he also underscores that, even though they are particular, they are still “...comments on more than themselves”. An ethnographic study’s generalizability could accordingly be compared to how Lincoln and Guba (1985) have valued research by its *transferability*. The research should, in other words, be presented with a thick description that makes it possible to assess whether the findings are transferable to other settings. This also matches my thoughts on this research study: by producing a thick description of this particular case, the results will be transferable to other contextually similar cases.

The ethnographic approach makes visible the everyday organizational life through first-hand experiences, not from someone being temporarily on the inside, but from an actual insider. It is an approach that highlights that “...the intricacies of everyday organizational life can be better grasped not through questionnaires developed and analysed while sitting in an office...” (Ybema, Yanow, Wels & Kamsteeg 2009: 1), but by living in the setting on equal terms with the “natives”. And as Alvesson (2009: 163) states: “The insider is, potentially, better positioned than the outsider to reveal ‘the true story’...”, the insider has also a profound knowledge of the setting that may lead to a theoretical development that is more “...well-grounded in experiences and observations than is common” (Ibid.).

¹⁵ According to Reay and Jones (2016) a thick description is also essential when using the institutional logics perspective, that also is the theoretical perspective I use in this study (see Chapter 4), and they recommend the researchers using the perspective to “...ground their insights and abstractions to the context through quotes, observations, and thick description” (p. 442).

My own experience has been that the customer orientation of the SEA (the case organization) and its various manifestations is something that is discussed and treated quite differently depending on organizational level and context, and early on in my research I felt that the topic was more commonly questioned in informal contexts. In other words, I believe that I, as an enforcement officer myself, with knowledge about my colleagues' work situation and their terminology, have a greater possibility to understand the hybridity of the SEA, compared to if I was an outsider, or if I was a management employee. I am one of the enforcement officers; one of "us" (See Soeters 2007 assertion that coercive organizations often are characterized by an "us and them classification", which will be presented in Chapter 3).

However, the ethnographic approach also holds some pitfalls: the aim of producing a thick description might end up in an excessive focus on storytelling, and as a result the analytic side then risk getting lost. Denscombe (2009: 98) also warns that an insider may be blinded by familiarity. And as Malcolm Young, a police officer performing research on his own police organization, states: the "anthropologist at home" cannot move away: "...for it is not out there in the exotic or even in the backyard. It is neither here nor there, but is everywhere" (Young 1991:9). To be able to really see, describe and analyze the surrounding culture and how it is organized Young endorses the insider-ethnographer to step outside herself/himself, in a "detached intellectual process". He also underscores that studying one's own social surrounding may be a painful process as the findings might not necessarily be in accordance with one's perceptions. Furthermore, he warns that it may be a problematic process for the relationship between the organization and the researcher as no organization enjoys having its idiosyncrasies publicly announced:

The insider/anthropologist is therefore somewhat schizophrenic, something of a Jekyll and Hyde, for he knows that publication and explication might be career-suicidal but are necessary intellectual tasks (Young 1991: 10)

Alvesson (2009) also reflects on the potential risks of performing insider-research and he states that the "at-home ethnographer" must consider "the problematic side of closeness and personal involvement", and rather than, as the ordinary ethnographer, trying to break in, s/he must struggle to break out of the setting. This includes trying to avoid being blinded by the cultural context that the insider is a part of. One way to avoid this is to work with reflexivity and always question the interpretations that first comes to mind. Denscombe (2009: 91-93) also underscores that the ethnographer must provide

the reader with insight into the ethnographer's self and how his/her self may influence the research. This implies that the researcher must be open about his/her relationship to the subject under study; personal experience, personal perceptions and so on. The way I have presented my background and my preconceptions has been to write a preface and thereby letting the reader take part of the thoughts and reflexions I had as I entered this project.

2.1.2 Research ethics

As an insider with an ethnographic research approach, I must give attention to research ethics, as there are ethical implications with studying the everyday reality of an organization. For instance, it is vital that I keep all informants' anonymity in publication. As an insider I have also often discussed my research project with other employees of the case organization, employees who then have shared their thoughts about the topic with me, and sometimes, I must confess, provided me with quotes or reflections that have been tempted to use in the dissertation. However, as anonymity and informed consent are important ethical guidelines for this study I have limited the observational empirical data to only include my own thoughts and reflections on aspects that I have observed during my work. All direct quotes presented in this dissertation are consequently from more formal research interview situations.

A method to force myself as a researcher to consider possible ethical dilemmas that might be present when performing qualitative research is to write an "ethical protocol" (Kvale & Brinkmann 2014: 105 ff.). Kvale and Brinkmann recommend researchers to write an ethical protocol centred on three topics: *informed consent*, *consequences* and *the researcher's role*. An informed consent means that all participants are informed about the study and about the purpose of the study. As the research has been conducted at and on the SEA it has been important to always have the organization's approval of my research methods. In April of 2016 a letter was sent from me and my supervisor to the SEA (through the research coordinator at the authority) where my main intentions with the study was described, and where I proclaimed which methods I intended to use. In this letter of application I also requested the formal permission to include interviews and observations in my methods. This request was approved in September of 2016. In November of 2017, I contacted the research coordinator of the SEA for a final approval of the condition of the interviews, as I intended to conduct the first interview session during the forthcoming spring. With some minor specific requests (that I always would ask the team managers for approval before sending an interview request to a team, and that I always would send a copy of the team managers

approval to the research coordinator before starting to ask the employees for interviews) my suggestion for the interview form was approved by the SEA. When I have performed the interviews, I have always informed the interviewee about my study, its purpose and how I intended to publish it and that I might present the result in seminars or presentations. I have also informed the interviewee that s/he would be kept anonymous in publication but that other researchers might scrutinize my notes. All interviews have also begun with me informing the interviewee about how the information that s/he gives me might be included in the publicized material, and all interviewees have given me their consent before the interview.

Furthermore it is crucial to reflect on the possible negative consequences that might come for individuals as well as for the group that have participated in the project (in this case: enforcement officers of the SEA). However, it must also be emphasized that the consequences following from the study are hard to foresee and it is probably the ethical area that is most complex. As mentioned, no personal information that could reveal the identity of the participants is publicized in this dissertation. To this group (employees of SEA/enforcement officers) the research hopefully will be beneficial, as it will demonstrate the complexity in the working situation for the group and possible improvement of the organization's strategies.

In regard to my role as a researcher I believe that it lies in the mission to hold tight to integrity and honesty. It is my obligation as a researcher to always strive towards a high scientific quality with results that are as correct and representative as possible.

2.2 Methodological procedure

In the rest of this chapter I will focus on the more “hands-on” part of the research design, in other words I will present the methodological procedure applied in the study. As mentioned, this study has been conducted as a close examination of a specific case, a case that I have studied with a *triangulation* of methods. Triangulation is a way to accomplish a deeper understanding of a phenomenon by applying several methods. The aim is thus to capture the phenomenon from several different point of views. Triangulation may also be seen as a way to increase the validity of the research (Denzin & Lincoln 2000: 12). The methods included in my triangulation have been document analysis, interviews, and observations. But before presenting the methods I will devote a section to case studying and the theory I have applied.

2.2.1 A single case study analysed with the institutional logics perspective

A case study focuses on examining a phenomenon within a single setting and the aim is to generate an in-depth description of that specific case (Flyvbjerg 2006; Jensen & Sandström 2016: 42). The presentation of a case study is often divided into a descriptive part, and an analytic part (Jensen & Sandström 2016: 80). This is also how I structure this dissertation: I begin by describing the case (Chapter 5 and 6), and then I move on to present my analysis (Chapter 7). It is relevant to ask how much we actually learn by only studying one specific case. According to Flyvbjerg (2006) true expertise is created by the experience of many cases and consequently one should consider a case study as one piece of a larger puzzle. The single case study thus, first of all, lets me as a researcher better understand and explain the specific phenomenon within the specific context studied, and only by studying the phenomenon within many different contexts (i.e., in many cases) we may accomplish true expertise in regard to the phenomenon. A case study may, however, also be valuable for its own sake, not least when it falls outside the conventional wisdom, or as Flyvbjerg (2006) puts it, when one is able to identify a “black swan”: “What appears to be ‘white’ often turns out on closer examination to be ‘black’” (Flyvbjerg 2006: 228).

When I have approached the case of this study, and as I have analysed my empirical data, my aim has been to stay as close as possible to the observed reality. However, it is also important to emphasize that I have not started intellectually empty handed. Theory have provided me with a “vocabulary”, it has constituted a lens through which I have looked at my empirical material, a lens that have helped me to “uncover the conceptual structures” (Geertz 1983: 229) that surrounds my subject of interest. Thus, instead of claiming to have had a pure deductive (or inductive for that sake) approach I would rather claim to have had an *abductive approach*. I see abduction in the same manner as Kennedy (2018) who says that abduction is about undertaking “...a selective and creative process to examine how the data support existing theories or hypothesis as well as how the data may call for modifications in existing understandings” (Kennedy 2018: 52). In other words, I have tested the empirical data against theory, but also moved the other way around. Or as stated by Kennedy when explaining the work of the abductive qualitative researchers: “Like the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes, they constantly move back and forth between data and theories, and make comparisons and interpretations in searching for patterns and the best possible explanations” (Kennedy 2018: 52).

Denis, Ferlie and van Gestel (2015) have identified four possible theoretical pathways when a researcher is about to analyse organizational hybridity: governance theory, institutional theory, actor network theory, and the identity perspective. Each one prioritizes a particular level of analysis, but Denis, Ferlie and van Gestel instead recommend researchers to analyse organizational hybridity on several levels, this to make way for new perspectives and insights of the phenomenon. In this study I have applied the so-called *institutional logics perspective*, a theoretical perspective that many scholars depart from when exploring organizational hybridity (Alexius & Furusten 2019b: 5; Reissner 2019: 49). The institutional logics perspective is a variant of institutional theory and by applying the perspective, the study is positioned within a well-developed theoretical tradition. The perspective also enables, just as recommended by Denis, Ferlie and van Gestel, an examination of organizational hybridity on more than one analytical level, on field level, organizational level as well as on an individual level. The latter is possible as the perspective, in the words of Reay, Goodrick, Waldorff & Casebeer (2017: 1046): "...provide a theoretically interesting way to conceptualize professional role identities". (See also Ashworth et al. 2013 for further alternative theorizations of organizational hybridity).

Organizations that hybridize by adopting elements from other sectors are, according to the institutional logics perspective, potentially carriers of multiple *institutional logics*. Thus, when a market-inspired element is adopted by a public organization it might bring a market logic into an organization which formerly used to be completely dominated by a public-sector influenced institutional logic (a "state logic" or "bureaucratic logic"). This results in a state of *institutional complexity*, a concept describing a situation where the organization and the employees of the organization are influenced by various, and sometimes seemingly incompatible, institutional logics and, as a result, the organizational members also confront multiple different possible professional identities (e.g., Greenwood, Díaz, Lorente & Li 2010; Smets, Morris & Greenwood 2012; Skelcher & Smith 2015). In Chapter 4 I will further present the institutional logics perspective in general, and particularly the state of institutional complexity.

As with all research this research project began with an initial exploration of the relevant literature, followed by a more comprehensive literature review. The literature that I reviewed may be categorized in three different, yet still related, themes: literature on public sector (market-inspired) reforms (including NPM and its outcomes), literature on organizational hybridity (including literature on the theory on institutional logics), and literature exploring the concept of customer orientation. (This also corresponds with the

sectioning of Chapter 3 that constitute a presentation of the literature and the current knowledge on the topic). The literature exploring public sector reforms is extensive. As I first and foremost explored this literature with the intention to contextualize the hybridity of public organizations, I did not systematically review this literature. Instead it was tracked by using a snowballing method, i.e., the review started with a few key texts and then grew as I identified further relevant literature referred to in the texts that I started with. The literature on organizational hybridity and the institutional logics perspective was found through a combination of search procedures, in other words I both systematically searched the academic literature using the search engines provided by the university, as well as detected the literature through a snowballing-process. The review of the literature on customer orientation, which covered a market- as well as a public perspective (even though the focus was on literature that scrutinize the adoption of customer orientation by public organizations), was also detected through a combination of search procedures (systematic search procedures using search engines as well as snowballing). It should be underscored that, even though a comprehensive literature review was carried out early in the research project, the process of reviewing relevant literature has been a continuous process throughout the entire research project. Sometimes the literature has been updated in systematic search processes and sometimes through recommendations from other scholars or from the literature that has been provided in PhD-courses or seminars.

2.2.2 Document studies

According to Atkinson and Coffey (1997) ethnographic fieldwork primarily has been focused on oral cultures, yet many cultures and settings today are self-documenting and self-describing. This means it is crucial that we, in order to understand the contemporary society, include the “products of self-description”. Performing documents studies has, consequently, been a way for me to include the “self-descriptions” in my examination of the case organization. Document studies is thus, along with ethnographic observations, the methodology that constitutes the empirical basis for the research question of how an organization respond to the pressures of a hybrid setting.

As an insider I have been able to easily retrieve organizational documents myself. A few times I have had to ask managers or archive staff about how different documents relate to each other or how to retrieve a certain document, but I have always been provided with the documents that I have requested. The documents I have used in my analysis have been various organizational strategy directions published during a ten-year period, from 2009 to 2019, and

articles that have been published as “news” on the authority’s intranet¹⁶ between 2010¹⁷ and 2019.

The strategy directions of the SEA are of a formal character; they have been thoroughly examined and contested by several persons before finally approved by the director-general and/or some other top-management employee. When I retrieved the strategy directions, I started with the directions that were listed on the SEA’s intranet. Most of them were in their turn referring to a document that it had replaced (or supplemented) and I then searched for that specific document. The documents that I was not able to find myself were ordered from the organization’s archive-service. The strategy directions amounted to 53 documents and of a total of over 400 pages. The employees’ use of the strategy directions most probably differs from document to document. A few may be used as guidance during work, others may form a basis for discussion on a team meeting while some, perhaps, are never noticed by the employees, especially not by the frontline employees as there are other more hands-on type of documents, as well as a handbook, that are supposed to guide the frontline employees in their work.

When I approached the articles published on the intranet I started by going through all articles published between 2010 – 2019 in search for articles that discussed strategic or operational news, presented an interview with an employee or told a story about something happening to or within the SEA. The articles included in my final analysis amounted to 185 news articles and the length of the articles varied from a few lines up to one page and in a few cases even longer. The intranet articles are of a more unofficial character compared to the strategy directions, although they are most often written and published by communication professionals. The articles on the intranet are by the SEA described as a complement to the management’s oral communication (SEA 2015b) and they are also said to endorse the desired culture of the organization (SEA 2016a). The texts on the intranet are probably commonly read by the

¹⁶ An intranet is a computer network that only may be read by the members of an organization. It is, by default, the start page of the Internet browser when you connect to the Internet from a computer that belongs to the authority. The intranet of the SEA has been named “Utsökt”. “Utsökning” is a Swedish term for “enforcement” while “utsökt” is meaning “delicious”. Consequently, the word is repeatedly used in a playful manner by the SEA in (more or less) unofficial contexts. On the intranet of the SEA news articles are published that concern the organization; ranging from practically matters (as for instance changes in how to book a journey) to more newspaper-like reports or interviews.

¹⁷ The current intranet was created in the year 2010 why it was not possible to retrieve articles from the year 2009 (and I was thus prevented from retrieving intranet-articles from the same annual range as with the strategy directions).

employees, although this probably also differs depending on commitment and/or interest for what is happening within the organization.

2.2.3 Interviews

Performing qualitative interviews has been another method that I have included in my triangulation of methods. Qualitative interviewing is a method used to retrieve detailed information from a smaller number of respondents. Interviews are also a good method when the aim is to capture data born from emotions and feelings, aspects that cannot be captured by the answers given in a questionnaire (Denscombe 2009: 131-132). One question that a researcher applying the method must answer is how many persons that ought to be interviewed in the research project. I did not start with a predetermined number of persons that I intended to interview, instead I gradually felt that I started to reach saturation when I recognized that several themes continuously were repeated by the respondents. The interviews thus gradually became more and more predictable which eventually made me feel that I had “enough” respondents.

This study is based on interviews with 37 public servants employed as enforcement officers (or aspiring enforcement officers) (17 women and 20 men). When recruiting enforcement officers to the interviews I had, as mentioned above, an agreement with the SEA that I would start the process by asking team managers if I had their permission to ask their subordinates if they were interested in participating in my study. Totally I asked sixteen team managers for their permission to send an email to their team to ask for volunteers. Fourteen of the sixteen team managers that I asked allowed me to proceed by sending the emails. The two team leaders that rejected my request motivated their answer by referring to a heavy workload and that they did not want to stress their team members with any further duties. The fourteen teams that I emailed consisted of twelve up to twenty enforcement officers, consequently approximately 200 enforcement officers were asked to voluntarily be a part of my study. In the email that I sent to the teams I presented myself and explained that I was performing a research project about “the customer orientation of the authority” and that I was searching for volunteers for an interview study. Thus, all respondents of this study are volunteers. The interviewed officers were employed at ten different offices located in different parts of Sweden.

It may be argued that this kind of recruitment process creates an opening for a somewhat biased sample, as the voluntary interviewees might choose to participate due to a certain commitment to the topic, be it negative or positive.

The study might then miss the uncommitted group (large or small), the enforcement officers who does not care about the customer orientation of the SEA, or who finds it more or less irrelevant. However, this is a bias that any research must allow for (even if a survey is used, it will have respondents that have been committed enough to take the time to fill in the answer). The ethnographic insider approach might, somehow, reduce the impact such a bias might have as I, as an insider, may take note of whether the findings I detect corresponds with the general, most common, view as I experience it, or not.

The interviews I performed may be categorized as one-to-one semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. I share Kvale's (1994) idea about the interview being an interactive process between the researcher and the interviewee, and I was always open about my background and insider-role (as both an employee and enforcement officer myself). The interview sessions begun with me briefly explaining the purpose of the interview, explaining that I would record the interview, and before the interview began I always let the interviewee ask any questions about the interview or the project. Also before the interview began, when I had clarified all the conditions of the interview, I made sure that I had the interviewee's full consent. In line with the so-called "funnel technique" (Kvale & Brinkmann 2014: 172) the questions and the dialogue became more and more specific as the interview went along. In the end of the interview all the aspects of the research could be discussed with the interviewee. The questions asked during the interviews were drawn up with the intention of stimulating a positive interaction in where the interviewee felt encouraged to talk about her/his experiences and feelings. The questions were rather short, comprehensible and without academic jargon¹⁸. During the interviews I tried to act neutral to avoid showing reactions that otherwise might have made the interviewee dodge sensitive questions or might have steered the interviewee into a certain path¹⁹.

The interviews were carried out during winter and spring of 2018 and summer of 2019. The interviews lasted between twenty minutes up to one and a half hour with an average of about 45 minutes. Five of the interviews were performed via video call (Skype), as the interviewee was in an office on a

¹⁸ The research questions can be seen in Appendix I, however it is important to emphasize that the questions sometimes were revised during the interviews and complementary questions sometimes were asked.

¹⁹ The fact that a rather small change in the formulation of a question might affect the answers has been shown by for instance Loftus and Palmer (1974), but according to Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) the qualitative interviewer does not have to worry about asking leading questions, instead the qualitative interviewer should acknowledge that some questions might be leading and make them explicit in publication.

geographical distance that made it economically and timely untenable to try to arrange an in-person interview. One may perhaps discuss the suitability of doing qualitative interviews via video, but I experienced the video interviews to be just as valuable as face-to-face interviews, and for instance Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) acknowledge the advantage the method offers when interviewing geographically distanced people.

Performing qualitative interviews might at first seem like a rather easy way to find the answers to the research questions, as it is relatively resource effective compared to other methods, and as all you need is a recording device and the consent of the interviewee. It is, however, important to emphasize the time-consuming work that follows having completed the interviews. Every interview that was carried out for this research project has been transcribed verbatim so that I had the interview in a written form when I started the analytical process. The transcriptions of the interviews were made also with the intention to capture emphases and emotional expressions, such as laughs or sighs. In transcribed form the interviews comprised over 260 pages of text.

2.2.4 Observations

As an employee of the case organization, working as an enforcement officer of the SEA, I have been present in the ordinary daily life of the organization. As mentioned above I have strived to let the research project benefit from the fact that I am an insider by applying an ethnographic approach. For me the ethnographic approach has, from a practical point of view, meant that I have included observations in my triangulation of methods. Observations is in the words of DeWalt and DeWalt "...a way to collect data in naturalistic settings by ethnographers who observe and/or take part in the common and uncommon activities ..." (2011: 2). As an insider performing observations, I have had the chance to somewhat also capture the "unspoken", the notions that "goes without saying". Notions that an outsider might have missed (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2009: 68), or, for that part, notions that are not formally written in any document. Performing observations has also been a method that has aided me to evaluate the findings from my other methods. In other words I have been able to see whether the daily practice corresponds with the official stories presented by the SEA (in the documents) and the stories presented by the employees (in interviews).

In practice, conducting observations has meant that I during the work with this research project, continuously have taken notes of any reflections I had relating to the topic of the study. During the work with this project, I have made roughly 100 notes, ranging from very short ones of a sentence or two, up to

short stories of occurrences, along with my initial reflection. As explained earlier I have placed a great importance in keeping all informants anonymous and to always make sure that the participants in this study have given their informed consent. Therefore the observational data that I include in this dissertation is solely of a self-reflecting character. An example of a fieldnote may be taken from December 2018 when there were a lot of discussions among the enforcement officers about the quantifiable measures that had been imposed on them as the SEA then started to measure the number of started investigations. On the 6th of December I wrote down the following not in my notebook:

Lots of discussion about “startup-targets” during this week. Discussion at team meeting and in informal conversations. Quantifiable measures are set against legal security. "We must achieve both." Demands of both a high number of performed investigations and thorough investigations. Conversations are sometimes held about alternative objectives that the officers believe would be better.

During the analysis this note was sorted under a category of empirical data indicating perceptions of a conflict between quantifiable measures and legal security. In other words, the observations have been my thoughts and reflections in regard to my experiences during my work and I have chosen not to include any quotes or other kind of notes that would risk either being easy to link to a particular person or being the result of an informal conversation. Thus, performing observations has been a way for me to force myself to reflect on how everyday events may be linked to the questions I ask with in this dissertation.

2.2.5 The process of analysing the data

The process of analysing the empirical data has been the same, independently of the source of the empirical material (documents, interview transcripts or notes from observations). The analysis has started with an overview and a read-through to review the material as a whole, followed by a process of searching for recurrences (patterns) and themes in the material. I then went through the themes and the notes I have taken during this process to compare it with theory: how do the themes match the existing theory. I have then returned to the empirical material, letting theory guide me to try to determine if the existing theory adds anything to the generating of themes. This process has several similarities to the hermeneutic process that sometimes is thought of as a spiral:

“...you begin in some part, try tentatively to relate it to the whole, upon which new light is shed, and from here you return to the part studied and so on” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2009: 92). In other words, in my analysis process I have aimed to move between new understandings and pre-understandings and with the empirical material in centre I have aimed for a reliable and representative interpretation of the case studied. In Chapter 4, in where I present the theory, that I have applied to analyse the hybridity of the case organization, I will further elaborate how I have analysed the data with the help of theory.

2.3 Evaluating the research

The accuracy of research is most commonly discussed and evaluated against the criteria of *objectivity*, *reliability*, *validity*²⁰ and *generalizability*. However, as social research, and particularly qualitative social research, is resting on a rather different philosophical foundation compared to natural science, these criteria and their implications must be discussed or modified to better suite a qualitative project. Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) discuss these criteria from the point of view of interview-based qualitative research. They suggest that a qualitative interview can be *objective* in the meaning that the interview process may be thoroughly examined, controlled and undistorted from personal prejudices, thus, that it is objective in the meaning that it is free from bias. Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) also discuss the concepts of reliability, validity and generalizability from point of views they consider more relevant for qualitative research. One way of increasing the *reliability* in interview research is, according to Kvale and Brinkmann (2014), to sometimes ask leading questions. Leading questions might, they mean, test the reliability in the answers and verify the researcher’s interpretations. Regarding *validity*, Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) aim to, as they say, ”demystify” the concept, so that the concept better might fit into a qualitative setting. Validity is, they say, not just about the methods used, it is also about the researcher and his or her moral integrity. Of certain importance is the researcher’s practical wisdom or the researcher’s “craftsmanship”; his or her skill to continuously and repeatedly control, question and theoretically interpret the results. To validate is thus

²⁰ Reliability concerns the overall consistency of a research result; a high reliability shows that the same procedure repeated under same or similar conditions would produce same (or at least similar) results. Validity concerns the accuracy; it is an assessment of whether the method used really measures what it is supposed to measure.

equal to being self-critical, it is a process of explicitly arguing for or against an interpretation, to confront different interpretations and assess them. To have this approach will, according to Kvale and Brinkmann, result in more valid research. To live up to the criteria of *generalizability* Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) recommend the qualitative researcher to aim at a “thick description”; a thorough and careful description of the case(s) that enables the readers to assess to what extent the case might be transferred to other settings.

But, in the end it is the person evaluating my research that will choose how to evaluate, and I can only aim to measure up to any evaluation that my research is exposed to. Then how, more precisely, have I carried out my research so that it may pass any evaluation? My aim has been to continuously reflect upon the methods I use as well as my contribution to knowledge. I have tried to let the subjects have their say, by asking them questions concerning my research topic as well as my interpretations and by making their voices heard in my text, i.e., being open about participants views, those that are expressed explicitly and, possibly even more important, those views that are expressed implicitly. I have also aimed at being self-critical and I have continuously assessed my methods and interpretations and, most importantly, always kept an open mind to the revision of my position. In order to somehow confirm that the results of the study is accurate and consistent, I have also, as the study approaches its end, presented and discussed the results with other enforcement officers to get their comments and reflections. During the winter of 2021/22 I presented the results for two enforcement teams, presentations that was followed up with a discussion. I have also presented the empirical chapters, the analysis as well as the conclusions to five of the officers whom I interviewed to gain their feedback and reflections.

2.4 Summary of Chapter 2

In this chapter I have presented this study’s research design. The chapter has been divided into two parts; *philosophical stance and ethical considerations* and *methodological procedure*. In the first part I presented how I from a philosophical point of view approached my research. I also presented my thoughts on having an interpretive approach, an approach that in many ways differ from more traditional scientific approaches as it is interpretive rather than experimental or predictive. In this first part of the chapter I also shared my thoughts on conducting an ethnographic project and what’s implied in being an ethnographer, especially being an insider-ethnographer. I also

described how conducting an ethnographic project implies aiming for a thick description, a concept indicating that the researcher is striving to write a detailed description of the reality of the “natives”. I also shared some brief thoughts on research ethics and how I hope to avoid ethical pitfalls.

In the second part I went more into detail on my methodology. I began by presenting my thoughts on conducting a case study before I briefly introduced the theory I use in this study when I analyse the case: the institutional logics perspective. Here, I also described my methodological choices and how I have applied them; the document studies that included the study of a large number of strategic documents and intranet articles; the interviews with 37 employees of the case organization, employees working at the SEA’s frontline as enforcement officers (or aspiring enforcement officers). I have also described how I have included observations in my methodology, observations that I have made during my work at the case organization that have resulted in numerous self-reflecting notes. I also described the process of analysing data and how I have applied a method that might be likened to the hermeneutic process of analysing empirical material.

The chapter then ended with a section in where I present my thoughts on how qualitative research (and thereby also this research project) could be evaluated. However, I also underscored that it is not I who should decide how to evaluate my research, instead I must be as transparent and reliable as possible and let the readers evaluate my research and my findings.

3 From bureaucracies to customer oriented organizations – a literature review

In this chapter I present the current state of knowledge in relation to the topic of the study, this from three perspectives. Firstly, in a section entitled “a movement from ‘bureaucracy’ to ‘entrepreneurialism’”, I focus on the reform movement that has swept over public management. A movement that has made public organizations look towards the market, a movement that accordingly has made organizational hybridity common within the public sector. Secondly, in a section entitled “the concept of organizational hybridity”, I present some of the earlier research that has explored organizational hybridity and how organizations as well as individuals respond to the multiple pressures of hybridity. Lastly, in the third and final section of the chapter I draw attention to the literature on customer orientation as the customer orientation of public organizations in this study is constituting the empirical phenomenon I study to examine hybridity in the public sector.

3.1 A movement from “bureaucracy” to “entrepreneurialism”

[T]he whole ‘New IRS’ thing was an increasing anti- or post-bureaucratic mentality [...] Meaning, in discursive terms, that the couple of years in question here saw one of the largest bureaucracies anywhere undergo a convulsion in which it tried to reconceive itself as a non- or even anti-bureaucracy, which at first might sound like nothing more than an amusing bit of bureaucratic folly. In fact, it was frightening; it was a little like watching an enormous machine come to consciousness and start trying to think and feel like a real human. [...] In the case of the [IRS] this convulsion, and the consequences of it, even if they were diffuse and undramatic, had an actual impact on the lives of Americans.

Above is a quote from the novel *The Pale King*²¹, a novel that takes place in an IRS office during the 1980's. It is a quote depicting how the US tax agency at the time went through a change that the author described as a comprehensive reformation of the organization. A reformation that was meant to entail the elimination of a "bureaucratic mentality", a mentality that was said to make the employees (i.e., the tax agents) follow complex and complicated routines instead of working efficiently. To counteract this mentality the organization thus tried to "reconceive itself as a non- or even anti-bureaucracy".

Reform attempts of public organizations similar to the one described in *The Pale King* have been documented in the public sectors of almost all western countries, reform attempts with the same objective: to reduce or even remove bureaucracy. The reformers have blamed bureaucracy for all the shortcomings of public organizations and often they argue, just as is described in *The Pale King*, that a bureaucratic administration makes public servants act impersonal, inflexible and inefficient (du Gay 2000: 2-6). These reforms have consequently sometimes been labelled as "anti-bureaucratic" (e.g., du Gay 2000; Olsen 2006; Harris & Wegg-Prosser 2007). A frequently applied "antidote" to "cure" public organizations from bureaucracy has been the introduction of market models and ideas. The underlying thought is thus that public organizations would function better if they became more market-inspired and more business-like. This is, as stated by Goodsell (2004), the result of two beliefs combined: "One is that bureaucracy is a bad if not a terrible performer. The other is that private business must be good performers, or they would not stay in business" (p. 49). There is a significant overlap between the reforms described as "anti-bureaucratic" and the reform movement briefly described in Chapter one: New Public Management (NPM). For as stated by Power (1999) the NPM ideal may ultimately be boiled down to "...a desire to replace the presumed inefficiency of hierarchical bureaucracy with the presumed efficiency of markets" (p. 43).

Scholars who have studied the tendency among public organizations to take inspiration from the market sector often have focused on how this has resulted

²¹ By David Foster Wallace. The quote can be found on page 82 of the Swedish translation "Blek kung" (Natur & Kultur 2012). The quote is in Swedish: "...hela "nya IRS"-grejen var en allt vanligare anti- eller postbyråkratisk mentalitet [...] Vilket betyder, i diskursiva termer, att en av de största byråkatierna som överhuvudtaget existerar under de två aktuella åren genomgick en total omvälvning som gick ut på att börja uppfatta sig själv som en icke- eller till och med en anti-byråkrati, vilket först kanske bara låter som något lustigt byråkratispratt. Men i själva verket var det skrämmande; det var lite som att se på när en enorm maskin vaknade upp och blev medveten och började försöka tänka och känna som en verklig människa. [...] I fallet med Verket hade förstås omvälvningen, och konsekvenserna av den, även om de var mer diffusa och odramatiska, en faktisk inverkan på amerikanernas tillvaro".

in that new values and principles have started to take over within public management. For instance, Miller and Rose (2008) state: “the social logics of welfare bureaucracies [have been] replaced by new logics of competition, market segmentation and service management” (p. 105), and Lundquist (1997) argues that the market-inspired reforms have meant that an economic rationalisation have come to be chosen over democratic values in public organizations. Karlsson (2014), on his part, describes how a “managerialist discourse” has resulted in an “economification” of the public sector, an “economification” that implies that demands of efficiency and economy (including an increased quantification, measurability and commensurability) now permeate the management of public organizations. Similarly, Pollit and Bouckaert (2011) have described how demands of efficiency and economy as a result of the reforms have taken over and replaced demands of effectiveness and equity, something they mean has been demonstrated by an increased focus on quantifiable measures and an aim to reduce costs²², and Slater and Tonkiss (2001) claim that the reforms have introduced new discourses of “enterprise”, “competition” and “flexibility” into public management. Slater and Tonkiss even claim that this in turn has led to the domination of a market logic that has come to “provide a means of thinking about social institutions and individuals more generally...” (Slater & Tonkiss 2001:1) while Ritzer (2015) even claims that society as a whole has been subjected to a “McDonaldization”, implying that the principles of the fast-food restaurant have been spread all over the world over a wide range of sectors and institutions.

One could, in other words, consider the increased hybridity among public organizations, i.e., the adoption of market-inspired elements in public management and the consequence that public organizations and public servants are exposed to market-associated demands, as derived from public sector reforms aiming to change public organizations from bureaucracies to more business-inspired and market-like organizations. But what is really a bureaucratic way of organizing? What ideas are embedded in this mode of managing that makes it criticized? And, how is the alternative to bureaucracy presented? In the following sections I will first describe the bureaucratic mode of managing public organizations, and then move on to describe the alternative, the market-inspired mode of managing public organizations that often has become favoured within the public sector, a mode that I have named entrepreneurialism.

²² Efficiency is here described as a matter of maximizing the ration between inputs and outputs (i.e., reducing the costs) while effectiveness is a matter of what outcomes that result from the inputs.

3.1.1 Bureaucracy

If trying to understand what bureaucracy implies one might want to consult the words of the sociologist Max Weber who is famous for, among other things, having described the bureaucratic way of organizing (thereof the expression “*weberian* bureaucracy” when referring to the typical bureaucratic form). According to Weber bureaucracy implies, first and foremost, a rational and effective way of organizing, primarily characterized by being hierarchical, with a rigid division of labour. It is a way of organizing in which specialization and expertise constitutes the basis for all action. Weber furthermore described bureaucratic organization as impersonal and standardized, with all its decision-making specified and restricted by rules and regulation (governed by a “legal formalism”) (Christensen et al. 2005: 36-40; Olsen 2006; Pollit & Bouckaert 2011: 71-73). In a similar manner Styhre (2009: 15 ff.) defines bureaucratic administration as a hierarchical way of organizing, with organizational members separated on the basis of functional specialization. Furthermore, he means that bureaucratic administration rests on the idea that the organizational members recognize the hierarchical order, whereas they also strictly follow rules and job descriptions. He also means that bureaucracy is built on the idea of separating personal interests from the office as well as being built on a “legal domination”, thus it is resting on a strict and formally decided legal order. Moreover, he underlines that bureaucracy implies a neutral and consistent way of treating all clients as “cases”.

The word “bureaucracy” is, however, today more associated with negative connotations such as inertia, inefficiency and inflexibility. Bureaucracy is also sometimes associated with nightmarish and Kafkaesque²³ relations with (primarily public) organizations. There are, however, many scholars and debaters claiming that these negative connotations are misleading. For instance Pollit and Bouckaert emphasize that there are many positive outcomes following from the bureaucratic way of managing, outcomes often forgotten in the debate, outcomes such as “...continuity, honesty, and a high commitment to equity in dealing with the citizen/public” (Pollit & Bouckaert 2011: 72). In a similar way Olsen (2006), first and foremost, defines bureaucracy by its intrinsic cultural values, values that he claims to include the preservation of the rule of law, and the upholding of accurate processes. Moreover, he claims that bureaucrats are supposed to be “...the guardians of, constitutional principles, the law, and professional standards” (Olsen 2006: 3). Olsen also means that

²³ In other words, like the characteristics of the worlds of Frans Kafka, and then especially, when in reference to bureaucracy, the strict and oppressive inaccessible authority of The Trial.

bureaucracy implies a “larger organizational and normative structure” that includes “the belief in a legitimate, rational-legal political order and the right of the state to define and enforce the legal order” (Ibid.).

du Gay (2000) is another scholar defending bureaucracy as he states that representative democracies still needs the bureaucratic ethos. He refers to the characteristic attributes of the bureaucrats, not as deficiencies, but as the products of practices and techniques that aids the bureaucrats to act according to certain norms (du Gay 2000: 42-43). For instance, from his point-of-view, a trained capacity to treat people as *cases* minimizes the risk for a treatment influenced by status, prestige or other individual attributes, thus establishing “the objectivity of bureaucratic decision-making”. Bureaucratic treatment could, consequently, according to du Gay, be considered a source of “democratic equalization”, and he emphasizes how objectivity is an element of a traditional treatment within public service that often is overlooked in the public debate, even though it is an element that most of the citizens highly value:

...the common complaint that government departments endlessly follow precedent might well lose its moral force if we find out that we have not received exactly the same treatment as our neighbour, friend or lover did in the same circumstances this time last year (du Gay 2000: 1)

Furthermore, du Gay claims that the critics of the bureaucratic mode of managing forget the “technical, political or ethical organization” of public entities. The critics of bureaucracy, he means, too often only look at it from the perspective of “entrepreneurial principles”, including economic efficiency and service delivery. According to du Gay this means that the political context is forgotten, a context in which “... managers must think not only about their immediate customers, but about their accountability to citizens, and to citizens’ representatives – elected legislators” (du Gay 2000: 86). du Gay also claims that if bureaucracy would be entirely replaced by a business-inspired management style then economic efficiency would perhaps be improved in the short run, but this improvement would be accompanied by less equality and a lower level of “...antipathy to corruption, fairness, probity and reliability in the treatment of cases and other forms of conduct that were taken for granted under traditional arrangements” (du Gay 2000: 94).

Similar reasoning about the bureaucratic mode of managing has also been presented by Aucoin (1997). He says that any deficiencies of bureaucracies rather are a result of bad management than of any intrinsic attributes. According to him the bureaucratic administration contributes to the rule of law, objectivity and “the faithful stewardship of the public trust”. Olsen (2006) also

dismiss the idea that bureaucracy is a model that could be fully replaced in public management, instead he asserts that modern heterogeneous societies will require public organizations to be organized based on several competing principles, of which bureaucracy must be included as one. Therefore he argues that it might be time to “rediscover” bureaucracy:

Public administrations face different challenges, command different resources, and are embedded in different political and administrative traditions. Bureaucracy, therefore, is not the way to organize public administration, for all kinds of tasks and under all circumstances. Bureaucratic organization is part of a repertoire of overlapping, supplementary, and competing forms coexisting in contemporary democracies, and so are market organization and network organization (Olsen 2006: 18)

Terms such as “post-bureaucracy” have come to be used on and by organizations that try to improve bureaucratic administration and, for instance, making the bureaucratic model more flexible while still holding on to its key characteristics (Styhre 2009: 90 ff.). However, many scholars question the suitability to entitle these organizations as “post-bureaucracies”, for instance Hales (2002) who instead prefers to use the term “bureaucracy lite” to describe similar tendencies. These organizations are, according to him, not organizations where there have been a lot of dismantling of hierarchies or tearing-up of regulations and therefore he claims that one cannot say that the bureaucratic form has been left behind (as the prefix “post” would indicate) but rather that different variants of the old ideal type has emerged.

3.1.2 Entrepreneurialism

The alternative to the bureaucratic mode of managing might be called “entrepreneurialism” or “entrepreneurial public management”. This is a mode of managing built on the idea that bureaucracy is a way of managing public organizations that must be replaced by a modern and more efficient and market-inspired managing mode permeated by an *entrepreneurial spirit*, i.e. the organizations are encouraged to be adaptable, customer-oriented, and proactive (Premfors, Ehn, Haldén & Sundström 2003: 17 ff.). It is a mode of managing built just as much on the critique of bureaucracy as it is highlighting an alternative. Bureaucracy is by the proponents of entrepreneurialism portrayed as the “ancient regime”, while the new regime with its business sector influences, is seen as a “...reaction to this grand old model from the

past” (Pollit & Bouckaert 2011: 71). Thus, the antidote prescribed against bureaucracy is reforms inspired by the market and the world of business.

Embedded in the entrepreneurial mode of managing are, according to Goodsell (2004: 149-156), four core concepts: market creation, entrepreneurial conduct, performance measurement and customer orientation. Consequently, this mode often includes transforming citizens into “customers”. The importance of using a market-inspired language for the proponents of entrepreneurialism has for instance been emphasized by du Gay and Salaman (1992). They conclude that the entrepreneurial style of managing is entrenched in a language that asserts that success is achieved only through “satisfaction of the customers”. In order to achieve customer satisfaction, public organizations must in its internal relations resemble market relations and introduce an “enterprise culture”, and define staff and departments as “internal customers” as well as enabling all members to “add value” to themselves and to the organization.

Another example of how the entrepreneurial way of managing public organizations may be described can be taken from Osborne and Gaebler’s (1992) influential book “Reinventing government: how the entrepreneurial spirit is transforming the public sector”²⁴. In this book the authors start by criticizing the bureaucratic mode, saying that it worked during the “old age”; “...not because it was efficient but because it solved the basic problems people wanted solved” (p. 14). They depict bureaucracy as a way of managing public organizations that was perfectly suitable for a slow-paced, hierarchical society where most citizens had similar wants and needs. However, in today’s society, a society that according to Osborne and Gaebler is characterized by “breath-taking change”, a society they describe as a “global marketplace” and “information society”, the citizens demand autonomy. Hence, in a modern society bureaucracy fails according to Osborne and Gaebler:

Today’s environment demands institutions that are extremely flexible and adaptable. It demands institutions that deliver high-quality goods and services, squeezing ever more bang out of every buck. It demands institutions that are responsive to their customers, offering choices of non-standardized services; that lead by persuasion and incentives rather than commands; that give their employees a sense of meaning and control, even ownership. It demands institutions that empower citizens rather than simply serving them (Osborne & Gaebler 1992: 15).

²⁴ “Something of an NPM bible” according to Power (1999: 43).

However, the main argument put forward by Osborne and Gaebler (1992) against the bureaucratic way of managing is that it fails in how it treats the citizens. The solution is, according to Osborne and Gaebler, to put “customers in the driver’s seat” by creating a customer-driven government, and, as they state: “meet the needs of the customer, not bureaucracy”.

An important aspect of an entrepreneurial way of managing the public sector is thus, according to Osborne and Gaebler, to “listen to the customers”. Osborne and Gaebler argue that there are numerous ways for public organizations to listen to the customers such as, for instance: customer surveys, customer councils, customer interviews or test marketing. Other ways of creating a customer-driven public sector are to letting the customers choose service provider, having public organizations that are user-friendly and transparent and making public managers to “think like entrepreneurs”. This latter aspect is achieved by allowing public entities to keep all or parts of the funds they save or earn and accumulate savings, letting them more often be self-supporting units (designed to create profit) and identify the true costs of public services (having accountants calculating the cost for each service, and using that number to foresee the cost for the coming year).

Yet another aspect of the entrepreneurial way of managing the public sector is, according to Osborne and Gaebler (1992), to act anticipatory; “prevent rather than cure”. They mean that the bureaucratic model is preoccupied with the delivering of services instead of being proactive, thus public entities “...wait until a problem become a crisis, then offer new services to those affected...” (Osborne & Gaebler 1992: 220). Consequently, the public budget is overburdened by the costs of treating symptoms while prevention strategies do not get much funding. Osborne and Gaebler proclaim that one way to become more preventive is using a “private sector discipline known as strategic planning”. Strategic planning implies, according to the authors, examining an organization’s current situation and future trajectory, setting goals, developing a strategy to achieve those goals and measure the results. According to Osborne and Gaebler (1992) the entrepreneurial way of managing is also aiming for participatory organizations to applying teamwork rather than being hierarchical. They argue that organizations structured in teams are more innovative and respond more rapidly to change than hierarchies and they especially promote “cross-departmental teams” that they mean encourage the members to see more than just the local problems, foster collaboration between departments and create a flow of ideas and information throughout the whole organization.

To sum up, the public sector reforms, that have paved way for an increased hybridity within public organizations, may be described as a movement from

a bureaucratic way of managing the public sector to an entrepreneurial mode of managing. The bureaucratic mode of managing is hierarchical and based on specialization, it is rule-based and strictly governed by the legal framework, an important aspect of the bureaucratic mode is that personal interest, and personal considerations, are left out of the decision-making, instead all *cases* should be handled equally and continuously. The entrepreneurial mode of managing is, first of all, based on the idea that bureaucracy is an inflexible and outdated way of organizing. Instead, the public sector should be more market-inspired, team-based rather than hierarchical and permeated with an entrepreneurial spirit that imply customer-responsiveness (rather than always leaning towards an equal treatment).

3.2 The concept of organizational hybridity

The reform movement described above has accordingly paved way for public organizations to adopt market-inspired elements, a situation which may be referred to as organizational hybridity. Organizational hybridity is a concept that has increased in use and significance within social science research the last decade (Segnestam Larsson & Wollter 2021: 1). The concept of organizational hybridity either refers to the situation when an organization has adopted one or several elements that usually is not associated with the organization's own "kind" (i.e., sector affiliation), elements that may be observable organizational structures, as well as conceptual ideas, strategies, functions, or approaches. Or it refers to the situation when an organization, in some other way, is balancing between different sectors (the public, private and non-profit sectors). Moreover, the hybridity is often said to indicate that an organization is permeated by multiple, and for the organization unacquainted, values or logics (Alexius & Furusten 2019: V; Segnestam Larsson & Wollter 2021: 13-14; Alvehus 2021: 90).

Organizational hybridity is often analysed with the help of the institutional logics perspective. This theoretical perspective implies that organizational hybridity leads to that the organizations are permeated with multiple, and sometimes competing, "institutional logics". The institutional logics perspective is also the theory I use in this study but as I will introduce the theory in an upcoming chapter (Chapter 4) I will further develop the theoretical implications in that chapter. It should be noted that the concept of organizational hybridity has also been disputed and for instance Karlsson (2014) rejects the concept of hybridity with the motivation that "the biological

metaphors inherent in the construction” (p. 272) suggests that “hybridization” will lead to a “new species”. But, I argue that the concept of hybridity today evokes associations beyond the biological, like for instance hybrid cars or other hybrid technology that are not thought of as a “new species”, but rather as an indicator that the “hybrids” contain something that previously has not been associated with their sort, the concept of hybridity is thus highlighting the mix.

It is often stated that organizational hybridity might be challenging, for the organizations (e.g., Alexius & Furusten 2019b: 11-14; Brandsen & Karré 2011: 828-831), as well as for the professionals working in the organizations (e.g., Reissner 2019). This is because hybridity generates multiple pressures in the form of demands that might be contradictory or even competing (e.g., Alexius & Furusten 2019b: 12). Pache and Santos (2013: 972) even proclaim that hybridity implies that the organizations become “arenas of contradiction”, and they conclude that these organizations “...need to find ways to deal with the multiple demands to which they are exposed”. Brandsen and Karré (2011) for their part warn that there are some “cultural and political risks” with organizational hybridity, but they also add that the organizations, by understanding such risks, may make conscious choices and dampening these risks. Alexius and Furusten (2019b) declare that managing hybridity could be likened to a balance act that “...requires substantial competence, judgement and ‘fingerspitzengefühl’ from those involved in management and governance” (p.12-13). Jancsary, Meyer, Höllner & Barberio (2017), for their part, state that organizational hybridity requires an organizational skill of “multivocality”, which implies a high level of flexibility; to be able to act differently depending on situation and the type of stakeholders that the organization in the specific situation is turning to. Alexius and Furusten (2019a: 354-356) build onto this idea by saying that two processes, *improvisation* and *versatility*, are central if successfully end up in a state of multivocality. The process of *improvisation* is then about the ability to sometimes deviate from standard procedures; the managers of the organizations must be able to “present their operations [...] depending on situation”. The process of *versatility* imply a capacity to understand the situation the organization is in, and to know when to decouple elements from the organization’s core operational activities.

When Fyrberg Yngfalk and Yngfalk (2019) are reasoning about how organizations ought to respond to hybridity they talk about the processes of adaption and activation. Adaption, they mean, is about upholding an organizational structure that fits the circumstances, while activation refers to a process of maintaining engagement within the organization, a process that includes to market the organizations unique hybrid identity both internally and

externally. Alexius and Furusten (2019a: 350), for their part, conclude that if the hybridity is increasingly perceived as a problem then an organization must be able to “de-hybridize”. It should be underscored that many scholars also recognize a potential in organizational hybridity. For instance, Hustinx and De Waele (2015) claim that “hybrids” are better prepared than “non-hybrids” to effectively and creatively deal with the multiple pressures of a complex and uncertain environment. Organizational hybridity is sometimes also suggested to aid organizations (and thereby society as a whole) to become more sustainable, although such suggestions often are said to be politically or ideologically based (Alexius & Furusten 2019a: v).

Alvehus (2021: 91-96), who just like many other scholars depart from hybridity as a mix of different and sometimes competing logics, proclaims that there are three main hypothesis on hybridity; a degradation hypothesis saying that hybridity is a false or at least instable state; a harmony hypothesis saying that hybridity is a sustainable state that is harmonic; and a loose coupling hypothesis saying that hybridity is a state of tensions, but that these tensions can be managed by a process of separation of competing logics. To these hypothesis Alvehus (2021: 100 - 104) also adds a fourth hypothesis that he calls “superficial hybridity”. According to this hypothesis hybridity has different outcomes depending on where one looks, if only viewed at distance one will merely see the “myths and mystifications produced at the surface (p. 102). Instead, to understand hybridity one must look to “the nitty-gritty reality of everyday work”, and Alvehus proclaims that “true” hybridity perhaps only exists on the surface. In other words, organizational hybridity is often superficial.

3.2.1 Organizational response to hybridity

In this study I examine the organizational and individual response to hybridity in the public sector. It is, therefore, interesting to explore what earlier research say about how organizations and individuals respond to hybridity. Oliver (1991) does not depart from the concept of hybridity but sets up a typology of five types of organizational “strategic response to institutional pressures”. He finds that organizations may respond with acquiescence, compromise, avoidance, defiance, or manipulation. *Acquiescence* he describes as a passive response of adherence or compliance, whereas *compromise* implies a more active balancing or negotiation between different pressures. The strategic response that he calls *avoidance* means that the organizations “hide” nonconformity with purely symbolic compliance, while *defiance* implies rejection or ignorance of at least one of the pressures. Finally, *manipulation*

implies the active attempt to adjust or influence the institutional pressures (or their promoters).

Pache and Santos (2013) study social enterprises in France, entities that must manage social demands alongside commercial demands. Their study shows that these organizations respond to these different, and to some extent competing, demands by strategically combining purposefully chosen elements of the hybridity, this to avoid the potential tensions between the different demands. Another organizational response to hybridity is presented by Battilana and Dorado (2010). They study two micro finance organizations in Bolivia, organizations that had to manage demands of helping the poor alongside demands of profitability, and they mean that the organizations had developed organizational identities that balanced the different demands.

Yet another often reported organizational response to hybridity is a strategy of separating, or decoupling the different pressures that come with the hybridity. This response could be compared to Meyer and Rowan's (1977) recommendation to organizations to decouple policies derived from external pressures from internal activities. A response of decoupling is, for instance, indicated by Binder (2007) who finds that the different logics permeating the organization under study are common sense in different organizational departments. Segnestam Larsson and Alexius (2019) state that a strategy of decoupling, is common among hybrids, as an attempt to somehow protect their operational level from competing demands, and in this way being able to "have it both ways" (p.106). After having studied the company Samhall (a large state-owned company that might be categorized as a hybrid as it has a social mission) Jutterström (2019) finds that the organization does not apply this kind of decoupling strategy. Instead the organization tries to conjoin market-inspired values with the social purpose of the organization also on the operational level, something that he means lead to conflicts in the local practices. He argues that the case of Samhall shows that hybridity might end up problematic for the daily activities when the different demands are not being decoupled, and he even goes as far as saying that the negative outcomes of hybridity may end up unsolvable.

To decouple the pressures of hybridity also seems to be a common response to hybridity among public organizations. For instance, Baker (2013) describes how a drug court in the US resolves the tensions that arouse between demands of medicalization and demands of criminalization by separating these demands in accordance with the hierarchal structure of the organization. And Fossetöl et al. (2015) show how public organizations in Norway (labour and welfare administration) sometimes respond to multiple demands of hybridity by a strategy they call "negative hybridity", which implies a separation of the

demands. Furthermore, they find that the public organizations studied may respond with “non-hybridity” (ignoring new demands), “ad hoc hybridity” (indecisive adherence to both demands), and “positive hybridity” (integration of both demands”).

3.2.2 Individual response to hybridity

What do earlier research then say about how the employees’, the individuals inside the organizations, respond to the pressures of hybridity? Reay and Hinnings (2009) focus in their research on health care workers following the introduction of a new business-like health care (including cost-effective treatment and customer satisfaction). The authors mean that a business-inspired health care challenges the traditional medical professionalism of health care workers. Their study aimed at understanding how the individual health care workers, in their day-to-day work, manage this situation. Their study reveals that the health care workers respond by holding on to a traditional medical professionalism, while they also establish collaborations with managers that support the “new” business-like health care. Collaborations that are aiming to achieve desired mutual goals, at the same time as they enable for the health care workers to maintain their independence and their traditional professionalism.

Another response among individuals to the pressures of organizational hybridity is reported by Nordstrand Berg and Pinheiro (2016). They show how managers of the university and hospital sectors in Norway deal with hybridity by developing a “hybrid oriented leadership” that reduces the tensions between the different, and to some extent competing, pressures that permeates the sectors as a result of the hybridity. A similar result is also presented by Meyer et al. (2014) as they examine how a “new managerial logic” (including efficiency, performance orientation, competition etc.) and a “traditional legalistic-bureaucratic logic” (including equity, professionalism, public interest, procedural safeguarding etc.) relates to PSM - public service motivation (motives, values and attitudes on serving the public interest). They demonstrate that despite managerial reform initiatives, the civil servants are still anchored in bureaucratic ideals. From these results Meyer et al. draw the conclusion that new managerial ideas (including demands of acting customer oriented), among civil servants often are added to a core identity based on traditional legalistic-bureaucracy, thus resulting in a, what they term, “hybrid identity”. A similar result is also presented in a study by Hendrix and van Gestel (2016) in which the authors find that the employees of the healthcare and education sectors in Netherlands respond to multiple role expectations by

a sort of hybridization of the professional roles, making them more versatile and complex. Moreover, in a study by Dahlmann and Grosvold (2017) the authors examine how environmental managers in UK firms manage environmental demands alongside market demands, and they conclude that some integrate the demands while others in practice hold them apart and focus on the market demand in relation to the practical work. Similarly, Bévort and Suddaby (2016) show that employees despite institutional and organizational pressures have a high degree of individual agency in how to interpret their professional identities. They emphasize that tensions might occur on an “existential level” as the individuals struggle with questions like “who am I” and “what is my personal role in this new mode of organizing” (p. 34). Consequently, they mean that individual subjective identification with the hybridity is a “crucial precursor” in the integration of hybridity.

3.2.3 The interplay between the organizational- and individual level

The implications of organizational hybridity have mostly been studied on either an organizational level or on an individual level, but there are some studies that connect the two levels. A study connecting the levels has been conducted by Buffat (2014) who did an ethnographic study at a public unemployment fund in Switzerland. He means that the hybridity for the organization studied seems to be strategic, and the organization plays with varying “identity cards”, whereas the employees are forced to play “identity games” and adjust to the situations and challenges they face at each moment. Buffat also reports about a discrepancy between “...certain discourses heard (an emphasis on organizational ‘flexibility’, ‘responsiveness’ etc.) and the working practices observed (a rather ‘bureaucratic’ way of functioning, a culture of rule enforcement, the pervasiveness of vertical controls)” (2014: 84). Similar results are also detected by Bjerregaard (2011) in a study of two social care organizations as the study shows that the organizations under study appear as responding coherently to the new demands presented to the organizations, but that diversity may be spotted on the level of employees and in relation to practical problems – middle managers and frontline staff applied different strategies to balance the different demands of hybridity.

Reissner (2019) also focuses on the interplay of hybridity between the organizational level and the individual level at an “extreme case of public-private hybrid organization” (p.49): an organization created in an institutionalized public-private partnership. Her study reveals that the organization struggles with its organizational identity, and this also affects the

members of the organization as many individuals working in the organization struggle with the question of what the organization may be (the “organizational identity”). Reissner identify two “sensemaking mechanisms”, by which the members of the organization try to overcome this struggle, mechanisms that although being influenced by the official account of how the organization is presenting itself (a “blended hybrid”) also let the members decide what the organization may be: a mechanism of “relational positioning”, meaning that the members may compare their organization with partner organizations, and a mechanism of “discursive framing”, a mechanism that captures the members hopes and expectations for the organization in which they work.

3.3 The concept of customer orientation

In this study I focus on a certain kind of organizational hybridity – when public organizations take inspiration from the market sector by adopting customer orientation. Accordingly, public sector customer orientation constitutes the empirical phenomenon I study as I explore hybridity. In the following sections I will explore the concept of customer orientation; the origins of the concept, and what it is said to imply in a market- as well as in a public setting.

The idea that companies should aim to be customer oriented first appeared as an element of the Scientific management movement (sometimes also referred to as “Taylorism”), a school of thought that aimed to improve labour productivity by analysing workflows and then propose different improvement measures (Duffy, Bruce, Moroko & Groeger 2020: 181-182). Later, customer orientation was incorporated into the field of marketing by Levitt (2008/1960) who claimed that many companies were stuck in a “marketing myopia” as they had become product oriented instead of, as he claimed that they should be; customer oriented. Levitt asserted that product-oriented companies, sooner or later, will face a situation in which they fail to live up to the changing patterns of the needs and tastes of the customers: “The industry has its eyes so firmly on its own specific product that it does not see how it is being made obsolete” (p. 48). Levitt meant that therefore it is vital for companies to understand that an industry is a “customer-satisfying process, not a goods-producing process” and that companies must adopt a “customer-satisfying logic”, i.e., a logic that recognizes that companies’ aim should be to satisfy the customers’ needs. A company should, in other words, not focus on a product, instead it should focus on how to deliver customer satisfaction, and then create the products that could achieve this goal. Levitt claimed that if a company achieve this goal then the

company will be successful, and not only be successful but even achieve “the visceral feel of entrepreneurial greatness” (Levitt 2008/1960: 79)²⁵.

There is, however, no universal definition of customer orientation. Within the business- and management literature customer orientation is sometimes boiled down into catchy business slogans advising organizations to “put the customers first” or to “stay close to the customers”. In this type of literature customer orientation is often highlighted as a vital philosophy for successful organizations, as for instance in Peters and Waterman’s (1982) influential book *In search of excellence* in which the authors present “eight essential and perennial business truths” of successful companies. Of these “business truths” one is “staying close to the customers”, meaning (for instance) being service oriented and having an ability to “listen to the customers”. According to Peters and Waterman this is, of their eight business truths, the hardest one to accomplish, as customer-oriented organizations must pay attention to the “wonderfully irrational end users”.

If instead turning to the marketing literature customer orientation is frequently equated with, or a part of, “market orientation”, and most often it is explained as a matter of understanding the customers and their needs, and to be responsive towards those needs. Customer orientation is for instance embedded in Kohli and Jaworski’s definition of market orientation:

Market orientation is the organization wide generation of market intelligence pertaining to current and future customer needs, dissemination of the intelligence across departments, and organizationwide responsiveness to it (Kohli & Jaworski 1990: 6)

Another often cited definition of customer orientation within the marketing literature is the one presented by Narver and Slater (1990) who also consider customer orientation to be a component of market orientation. More specifically they consider market orientation to be composed of three “behavioural components”: customer orientation, competitor orientation, and

²⁵ Smith, Drumwright and Gentile (2010) have later claimed that organizations today have fallen prey to a new type of marketing myopia as a result of an overly narrow focus on customers, a too limited definition of the customers and their needs, and a failure to recognize today’s social context that they mean require businesses to address multiple stakeholders (instead of just the direct customers). To avoid this new marketing myopia the authors call for a shift from customer orientation to a “stakeholder orientation”, meaning that organizations should focus “beyond the customers”, and also engage with groups such as “activists, scientists, politicians, and the local community” (p. 5).

interfunctional coordination. The component of customer orientation they define as "...the sufficient understanding of one's target buyers to be able to create superior value for them continuously" (Narver & Slater 1990: 21). Customer orientation is thus, from their point of view, a matter of collecting knowledge about the customers and then to, based on this knowledge, create *value* for the customers.

The concept to create "value" for customers is rather often included as an element of customer orientation, for instance in Appiah-Adu and Singh's (1998) influential text about customer orientation. They accentuate the cultural principle that they mean is embedded in customer orientation, a principle that is centred on "providing the customers with *value*" (my emphasis). This cultural principle is especially important in regard to the implementation of customer orientation since they believe that this principle must permeate all the activities of the company, for the company to become truly customer oriented.

Following Levitt's (2008/1960) introduction of customer orientation into the field of marketing many companies and business firms started to incorporate the concept into their strategies and policies. But soon the concept came to be criticized for being difficult to operationalize and for its lack of practical instructions, and the idea that customer orientation is vital for successful companies eventually somewhat lost its momentum (Duffy et al. 2020: 184). Today customer orientation is sometimes said to be operationalized through management models and strategies that are more hands-on such as Lean, CRM (Customer Relationship Management), Just In Time and TQM (Total Quality Management). But, customer orientation is sometimes also considered as an alternative to such standardized models, an alternative that is signalling closeness and personal relations in where every customer is treated as a unique individual with personal wants and needs (the organizations are thus striving to providing "customized solutions" or "custom tailored products") (Ivarsson 2005: 17).

3.3.1 The customer orientation of public organizations

Customer orientation is not only adopted by organizations that operate on the market but, as mentioned, also public organizations today often strive to be customer oriented. Osborne and Gaebler (1992) was among the first proponents of public sector customer orientation as they argued for a "customer-driven government" and claimed: "People today expect to be valued as customers – even by government" (Osborne & Gaebler 1992: 167). According to Osborne and Gaebler (1992) customer orientation has several

advantages when applied within the public sector, such as forcing the public entities to be accountable to their clients, stimulating innovation, and leading to less waste. And last but not least, it forces the public organizations to always be up-to-date:

In a world in which cable television systems have 50 channels, banks let their customers do business by phone, and even department stores have begun to customize their services for the individual, bureaucratic, unresponsive, one-size-fits-all government cannot last (Osborne & Gaebler 1992: 194)

In the following sections I will explore the literature on public sector customer orientation. I will begin by scrutinizing the notion of “customers”, as an aspect of customer orientation in public management is turning the citizen into a “customer”. I will then look at the meaning of customer orientation as understood by public organizations, whereupon I will examine the critique that has been held against the use of customer orientation in public management (including the re-characterisation of the citizens into customers). Finally, I will move from the conceptual reasoning and instead review the empirical research that has examined customer orientation in public settings.

3.3.1.1 The notion of “customers”

Conventionally the users of public services merely have been characterized as citizens, or as “clients” (or “passengers”, “students”, “patients” etc. depending on type of public service). But along with the implementation of market-inspired models and strategies the users of public services have been re-characterized into business-associated terms such as “consumers” or, as when public organizations claim to be customer oriented: “customers”. The concept of re-characterizing the public service users into business- and market associated terms is often a cause for debate, and it is sometimes reported that the issue also is causing an intense engagement among the employees of public organizations (Clarke et al. 2007). But what defines a “customer”, and what attributes and characteristics are associated with the notion of “customers”?

If turning to a dictionary a “customer” is most often defined from the perspective of consumption, and then defined as “a person who buys goods or a service”²⁶. The notion often has also a connotation of activity; a customer is

²⁶ Definition from Cambridge Dictionary (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org>). In Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary (www.merriam-webster.com) a customer is defined as “one that purchases a commodity or service”.

a character that is “searching, innovating, forcing change and movement upon producers” (du Gay & Salaman 1992: 617). This way of thinking of a customer corresponds with a theme of narrative that Rosenthal and Peccei’s (2007) detect as they review how the customer is presented in the current literature, a narrative them calling “the customer of neo-classical economics”. Furthermore, a narrative which they conclude has been so influential that it provides the frame for our understanding of “customerness”. Rosenthal and Peccei even claim that the customer, as described within this narrative, constitutes “...a heroic ideal around which to structure society” (Rosenthal & Peccei 2007: 205).

In their review Rosenthal and Peccei (2007) find three different narratives in the literature in the areas of “consumption and organization” (thus, literature viewing the customer from a conventional market perspective), and three narratives in the New Public Management (NPM)-literature (thus looking at the customer from a public sector perspective). By taking a closer look at these narratives one may better understand how customers most often are viewed and related to.

The first theme of narrative that Rosenthal and Peccei (2007) identify in the literature viewing the customer from a market perspective is the narrative mentioned above, the narrative they title “the customer of neo-classical economics”. The customer is within this narrative described as a sovereign, a rational chooser with individually formed wants and desires: “He knows what he wants, whether he has received it and how to act if he has not” (Rosenthal & Peccei 2007: 204). As mentioned, this is a narrative that according to Rosenthal and Peccei formed both how we generally, as well as most organizations, think about, and relate to customers.

The second narrative that Rosenthal and Peccei detect is a narrative they have named “The customer of Total Quality Management”. The customer is in this narrative described in ways that resembles “the customer of neo-classical economics”. This is also a sovereign customer that forms the organization that s/he is doing business with, however it is emphasized that the customer values quality and his/her preferences in terms of quality are revealed by the organizations through market research. In other words the organizations must segment the customers and shape themselves after the customers’ different quality requirements.

The third theme of narrative that Rosenthal and Peccei discover stand in rather sharp contrast with the first two as it is a narrative describing “customerness” from a more critical point of view. Here you find the “the customer of critical sociology and cultural studies”. Within this narrative the customer has had his/her self-understanding of being a “sovereign customer”

created by the power of the “prevailing discourses of neo-liberalism”. The customer is consequently consuming goods and services to create a socially constructed identity, and the customer is “...always seeking to improve and to add value to himself through acts and choices of consumption” (Rosenthal & Peccei 2007: 206).

But, Rosenthal and Peccei are, as mentioned, not only focusing on how the customer is described from a market perspective, they are also examining how the customer is described in the NPM-literature. Within this literature they are also able to detect three narratives, narratives that may be described as the NPM-equivalents to the (above described) themes of narratives.

The first of these narratives they have named “the customer of the enthusiasts of entrepreneurial government “. This, they argue, is a cousin of “the customer of neo-classical economics”; it is a customer with an autonomous will possessing rationality and agency. It is a “...choosing, active, enterprising figure of respect and legitimacy” (Rosenthal & Peccei 2007: 207). The public organization should, according to this narrative, form its services according to the will of the customer. In the NPM-literature they also identify a narrative that they name “The quality customer of public services” and this is the equivalent to the “customer of TQM”. Here the customer is also described as a sovereign only more ambiguous and complex than in its market equivalent, it is a customer that must be treated fairly and for this reason renders segmentation. However, it is also a customer that must be educated by experts, experts that can explain the definition of quality. The third narrative within the NPM-literature is, just as within the literature on consumption and organization, rather critical in its view on customerness. This is a narrative that Rosenthal and Peccei have called “the customer of the critics of NPM”; here the customer is controlled by the structures, This is a customer that has limited capacities to develop an autonomous will and in case the customer has formed his/her own preferences it will regardless be the (public) organization that will define service standards. Hence, according to this narrative the re-characterization of the public service users into customers is “...no more than a mask to obscure or legitimize what is viewed as the real rational of NPM – namely, the (illegitimate) control over public sector professionals and other workers and/or the reduction of public expenditures” (Rosenthal & Peccei 2007: 208). This narrative also brings up a concern that if public organizations start to listen to its customers then the customers might become a danger to both themselves as well as to others (for instance to the public servant). Because according to this narrative the customers’ explicitly expressed wants and wishes might obscure his/her true needs: “This customer is presented as a deluded victim, in need of education by academics in order to throw off false

consciousness and realize his true (autonomous) needs” (Rosenthal & Peccei 2007: 209).

The connotations of the notion of customers may also be highlighted by comparing the “customer” with how we conventionally label the public service users: as citizens or clients. Clarke et al. (2007) have explored the user of public services as a “consumer” of public services and compare the “consumer” with the “citizen”. Citizenship, they mean, stress “egalitarian principles” (that everyone is equal before the law etc.), and they mean that the relationship between the citizen and the state most often are viewed as a vertical relationship of mutual obligations. In contrast the consumer first and foremost is described as someone who guard her/his own interests, and the consumer is only responsible for her/his own good. The citizen and the consumer may, according to Clarke et al. (2007: 4), be said to embody “a series of binary distinctions”. The citizen have a connotation of a relationship belonging in a state, while the consumer belongs on the market, the citizen implies a public relationship, the consumer a private, the citizen implies a political context, the consumer an economic, the citizen is a collective term, the consumer an individual, the citizen entails rights, while the consumer entails exchange. In a similar manner Bailey (2000) contrast “clients” with “customers”. According to Bailey a customer is a person who expects his or her expressed preferences to be fulfilled by the product/service purchased, while a client is a person “for whom professional services are rendered” (p.354). In other words, the notion of client implies a relationship between a professional and a person seeking this professional’s help or support, a relationship with an on-going, over-time lasting, interaction, while the notion of customer implies a casual relationship characterized as transactional: the “mechanical task of exchanging money for a product” (p. 356).

Table 3.1 A summary of the connotations embedded in the notions of “citizen”, “client” and “customer”/ “consumer” according to the reviewed literature

Citizen	Client	Customer/Consumer
Collectivism	Mutuality	Self-interest and individualism
A political context	-	An economic context
Brings attention to the aspect of rights and obligations	Brings attention to the aspect of professionalism	Brings attention to the aspect of exchange
A public relationship, a relationship belonging in a state	A long-lasting professional relationship	A casual and transactional relationship

3.3.1.2 *The meaning of customer orientation when applied in public management*

To customer orient public organizations implies more than just the re-characterization/re-naming of the citizen/client. Korunka et al. (2007) have tried to determine the specific characteristics of customer orientation when adopted by public organizations, and they quote Schedler who states:

Customer orientation in this context does not mean making the customer the measure of all things. Rather, it means providing a necessary service in such a way that it meets the customer's needs in the optimum manner (Schedler 1995 quoted in Korunka et al. 2007: 208)

Wagenheim and Reurink (1991) also try to re-define customer orientation (or "customer service") to fit into a public setting, and they determine that it is a "...management strategy that focuses on meeting the customer expectations. It is based on the idea that the organization will reach its goals effectively and efficiently through satisfaction of the customer" (Wagenheim & Reurink 1991: 263). They also state that customer orientation, when applied in public management, may be viewed as an organizational perspective that implies a focus on the customers by meeting their expectations by "doing the right things right the first time". It may also, they say, be seen as a philosophy or an attitude based on "...the belief that cooperating with the customer is more efficient and effective than attempting to dictate and control what the customer receives" (Wagenheim & Reurink 1991: 264). In the literature one may also find descriptions of public sector customer orientation such as "an organisational focus on customers and the capacity to provide employees with appropriate information" (Perryer 2009: 240) or "to understand the needs, both expressed and latent, of its customers in order to more effectively respond to those needs" (Paarlberg 2007: 225), while Nwankeo (1995: 6) states that the "fundamental thrust" of customer orientation, also when applied within the public sector context, "remains the goal of putting customers at the centre of strategic focus"

van der Hart (1990) more profoundly tries to disentangle what customer orientation means to public organizations, as he asserts that it must be "more than a slogan", and thus having an actual practical meaning. He starts his attempt by viewing the customer orientation of public organizations from three levels: strategic level, tactical level and operational level. He concludes that on a strategic level, public sector customer orientation is a matter of identifying target groups and the needs and behavioural characteristics of those target groups. On a tactical level, it is a matter of communication, how to reach out to the target groups (through which channel to use) and how to develop a

clearer plan of communication. On an operational level it is a matter of customer orienting the everyday practice, and ask questions like: What happens in the meeting between the citizen and the public servant, and how do we deal with our customers?

As seen, “the discourse of need” (as it is termed by Clarke et al. 2007), i.e., the concept of understanding the customers’ needs to be able to respond according to those needs, is just as in a market setting, often an ingredient of customer orientation when applied in public management. The customer oriented public organization must, in other words, recognize the customers’ needs, which raises questions of whom it is that owns the definition of need? Do the public sector customers know what they need, or do the professional, the public servants, know best? These questions relate to what Clarke et al. (2007) refer to as “the knowledge / power knot” which they defined as the unsettled question of how to relate to expertise and authority in the relationship between the public and public organizations.

According to Clarke et al. (2007) market-inspired ideas such as customer orientation has brought with them an increased reluctance towards the idea that the professionals know best, resulting in that public servants must let go of their advantage of having knowledge and power, and instead the citizens are supposed to be the experts on their own need, thus implying active, participating and very capable citizens. As a result of this Clarke et al. mean that public organizations, must establish a more “dialogic relationship” with the users of their services, a relationship that involve an increased attempt to engage and teach the public into being more responsible.

3.3.1.3 *The customer orientation of coercive public organizations*

The above may apply to all kinds of public organizations, but in this study, my focus is set on a public organization that may be categorized as *coercive*. Coercive public organizations may be defined as public organizations that have been authorized to by coercion or force (or by threats of coercion or force²⁷) enforce laws and regulations, organizations that thus sometimes must exercise authority and take coercive measures towards their clients. Coercion is perhaps most familiar in criminal law but is also, for instance, a feature in the enforcement of taxes. To hybridize coercive public organization by adopting customer orientation may appear as especially challenging, perhaps even

²⁷ One could say that there is a thin line between the threat of coercion and the use of coercion (and even force) because as stated by Ripstein (2004:2), if the tax law says I must pay then ”’must’ means something like ‘on pain of having my assets attached, or wages garnished. And that ‘must’ applies to me no matter what I happen to think about it’”.

paradoxical, as coercive public organizations (and, consequently, their employees) sometimes must take coercive measures towards their “customers”. Which is why it may be especially interesting to examine the phenomenon in such a setting.

Coercive public organizations are often said to differentiate from other types of public organizations. Soeters (2007) have explored the typical characteristics of coercive organizations²⁸ and he concludes that coercive organizations often are characterized by having steep hierarchies that are formalized in documents containing detailed rules and regulations. Another typical characteristic of these organizations is, according to Soeters, that the employees working at the street-level of these organizations have a strong “sense of territoriality” that manifests in an “us and them classification” characterized by cynicism and suspicion towards “them”: the clients, the general public, the media, but also towards the managers of their own organization. A common characteristic for these organizations is also, according to Soeters, that the street-level employees of these organizations in their work often are motivated by the thought that the assignments they perform are in the interest and safety of society and the general public.

There have been a few attempts to, on a conceptual level, explain how customer orientation may be adapted to coercive public organizations. One attempt may be detected in Alford’s (2002) reflections on public organizations’ customer/client strategies. Alford argues that, as public organizations cannot base their relationships with their clients on monetary exchange, they must instead look to the “social-exchange perspective”. Viewed from this perspective the public sector clients/customers may, even if they do not pay money directly, supply public organizations with value in the form of cooperation, information or compliance. This enables public organizations to develop a customer/client strategy based on (non-monetary) exchange. An exchange between an organization and its client may then involve anything that any one of the involved parties value. The exchange may also include more than two parties and more complex forms of reciprocity. Welfare recipients are, for instance, not paid money with the expectation that they will pay money in return, instead they are expected to give back to society by following laws and not breaking the social order.

How may the social-exchange perspective then be linked to customer orientation in the context of coercive public organizations? Following the ideas

²⁸ By him defined as organizations that are authorized to approach the general public in a coercive manner and legitimized to use coercion and/or force against those who “intend to harm the interest of the state and its citizens”.

of social-exchange theory the exchange between a coercive public organization and its clients may be about compliance and cooperation. One way of securing compliance could be to always apply harsh coercive methods, but as concluded by Alford, this would end up very expensive. Instead, meeting the client in a “customer-like manner” will, according to Alford, induce compliance. Alford and Speed (2006) have further developed the idea as they mean that a public organization more effectively may elicit compliance from its clients by understanding how “gifts” stimulates reciprocity: “...the clients ‘pay’ not with money but rather with behaviours that are helpful to the agency’s purposes” (Alford & Speed 2006: 319). A “gift” could be a better service quality, and it is more about how a person is treated than what s/he receives:

This is not just a matter of the regulatory agency broadcasting catchy advertisements or of its staff saying ‘good morning’ nicely when answering the telephones. Key elements include: responsiveness and speed of service; information; simplicity, respect and empathy; accessibility; and perceived fairness (Alford & Speed 2006: 316)

A higher service quality is also seen as a way to reduce the level of punishment that clients are subjected to, when the punishment becomes only the penalty prescribed by law, and not, as Alford and Speed claim often has been the case; that the process of being regulated almost becomes a part of the punishment (when treated with suspicion, having to wait in telephone queues, being shunted from one office to another and so on).

3.3.1.4 The implementation of customer orientation

The implementation of customer orientation is often depicted as an exhaustive process that must be backed up by cultural control. Customer orientation is, as a result of this, sometimes also accused of being a reason for management to control and routinize the employees (Ivarsson 2005: 59). Sturdy (1998) has reviewed how customer orientation and the “culture of the customer” have been adopted by business- as well as public organizations and how the employees respond to the implementation of customer orientation. In his review he identified two primary responses among employees: behavioural compliance and ambivalence. These two responses he meant could be described as a mental “balance act” over how much to give in to the ideas embedded in customer orientation and how much to avoid them. However, in organizations where the employees were firmly anchored in occupational norms he could see that the employees were likely to resist the ideas of customer orientation.

That the implementation of different policies and approaches, such as customer orientation, in public organizations sometimes might be difficult has also been established by Lipsky (2010/1980: 19-23). He states that street-level bureaucrats (i.e., frontline public servants) have great discretion to translate organizational policies into practice. This discretion is due to the often complex practical situations that frontline public servants are confronted with, situations that cannot be fitted into predetermined action programs. The frontline public servants also must take into consideration limitations of scarce time, financial resources, and information. Actual policy is, as a consequence, constructed by the frontline public servants in their daily encounters with clients. Reformers can, therefore, impose initiatives intended to customer orient public sector organisations, but they cannot directly enact how this will be treated in practice. For this, they must rely on frontline staff; it is them who must reconcile customer orientation in their concrete interactions with the “customers”.

3.3.2 Opposition and objections against public sector customer orientation

Customer orientation when applied within the public sector is frequently subjected to opposition and criticism, not least in the public debate. Critics for instance assert that considering the public sector clients as *customers* is inappropriate as citizenship often is claimed to imply a public interest (what is best for society), while the customer notion implies a purely self-centred view (as also seen above). To start considering citizens as customers would consequently, according to these critics, mean that people to a lessened degree would care for the whole community/society (“public values”) and instead would only care for themselves and their short-term personal interest. Some critics also claim that considering the citizens as customers might lead to that public organizations start to act as if the “customer is always right” and that the “customer” then might dictate the terms for the relationship and its outcomes (e.g., Laing 2003: 428-429; Ivarsson 2005: 21; Bailey 2000: 356).

Another concern often uttered when viewing the clients of public organizations as customers is highlighted by Peters (1998). He warns that governments as a result might abandon “traditional normative conceptions” about the right to equal service, and that public organizations, by considering the citizens as customers, risk to be influenced by well-organized “customer groups” and thereby restrict the rights that citizens have in relation to public organizations (Peters 1998: 1768). van der Hart (1990), on his side, lists several aspects that he means may interfere with customer orientation in public

services, such as that public organizations, unlike their private counterpart, must take more than one target group into account. He also claims that merely talking in terms of “target groups” implies that choices are made between citizens as to which will and which will not be served. But, public organizations cannot, he argues, make these kinds of prioritizations as any prioritization by a public organization might be interpreted as discriminating.

Another scholar problematizing the relationship between public organizations and their “customers” is Lipsky (2010/1980). Lipsky first underlines that clients of public services sometimes are in an unwilling or even reluctant relationship with the public organization. This, he means, may be obvious concerning coercive organizations like the police, but it may also be true in less obvious cases. Public organizations provide services that the people cannot get anywhere else, and even if there might be private alternatives many citizens may not afford such alternatives. This, Lipsky states, means that the poorer a person is the bigger the risk that s/he becomes an “unwilling customer” of the public sector.

Why is this “unwillingness” important to emphasize according to Lipsky? His answer is that “customers” of public organizations cannot, unlike the customers of commercial organizations, opt out of the relationship. Many times, the public sector customer might even be ready to “pay” a high “cost” to maintain the relationship. The relationship between a public organization and its clients is consequently, according to Lipsky, far from a co-equal relationship, and he even calls it a relationship of “unidirectional power” (Lipsky 2010/1980: 59).

Fountain (2001) is another scholar concerned about the use of customer orientation within public management. Although she admits that commercially influenced service models to some degree might improve the performance of public organizations she also warns that some public service “customers” still will be less capable and influential than others, and that this might lead to that the poor and politically weak might be poorly served. She also emphasizes that complaint handling is a central element in customer service strategies, something that may benefit vocal customers and not those that “suffer in silence”. She states that inequalities like these might be acceptable in the world of business, but they should not, she emphasizes, be accepted in public practices. Another component of her criticism is the fact that “a customer satisfaction rhetoric” is based on the presumption that customers know their preferences. But Fountain argues that experts often know better than most of the population, and she compares public servants with professionals like lawyers, who represent their clients “because of their superior experience and expertise”.

Hirschmann (1999) brings up another common objection against public sector customer orientation when he states that "...it oversimplifies the multifaceted reality lying behind the terms customers and government and also the complex relationship between the two" (p. 98). This complexity, he means, is due to several factors, such as for instance: the multiple stakeholders of public organizations, the citizen-customer being both purchaser and owner of the service, and also the monopoly situation and the differential in powers between the public organizations and their customers. Hirschmann also emphasizes that many critics have identified a risk in public organizations becoming no more than service delivery agencies:

This is seen as neither appropriate nor as always in the public interest. Some aspects of public service inevitably will lead to hostility, for example, taxing, fining, and regulating, and therefore having a satisfied customer may be directly contradictory to policy goals (Hirschmann 1999: 98)

Aberbach and Christensen (2005) also express concerns about customer oriented public organizations forgetting about the protection of social justice and equality, as they mean that these are matters that in the customer oriented public organization risk being replaced with "a simple slogan such as putting customers first".

3.3.3 Earlier empirical examinations of the customer orientation of public organizations

So far, I have presented customer orientation as a concept, and how the idea of customer orientation in a public setting have been conceptually criticized. But, what do the researchers find when they are examining the application of customer orientation in an empirical setting? In the remaining part of the chapter I will explore the empirical literature that focus on the adoption of customer orientation in public management.

3.3.3.1 Studies of market-orientation and business management models in the public sector

When searching for empirical investigations of the outcome of the customer orienting of public organizations, much of the literature focus on various other similar types of market-inspired reforms in the public sector. Like for instance a study conducted by Ariely (2011), a study that examines how five macro-level market-inspired strategies, among them "free-market orientations" (in which it is included that the citizens should be viewed as customers or

consumers), may be related to citizens' evaluation of public services. The study includes data from 25 countries and indicates that market-orientation strategies applied on public services lead to an increased number of negative descriptions of public service while an increased focus on actual service quality instead seem to generate more positive descriptions. Ariely concludes that governments should invest in operational quality improvements, like reducing the telephone queues or the time it takes to fill in the tax forms, instead of investing in different market-orientation strategies.

Another study that focuses on the market orientation of public services has been conducted by Walker et al. (2011), a study in which the authors examine whether market-orientation strategies improve the performance of public services. When Walker et al. sum up their conclusions they are, unlike Ariely (2011), rather optimistic about applying market orientation within public management as they find that different market-orientation approaches often seem to have positive effects on the citizens' perception of the performance of public service, at least when asking the actual users of the services. (For additional studies evaluating the market orientation of public service see, for instance, Durst & Newell 1999 and Torres & Pina 2004.)

Another branch of studies that may be found in the empirical literature are studies focusing on public organizations that apply specific management models derived from the business sector. For instance, Radnor and Johnston (2013) examine how Lean-management affects the relationship between internal processes and the customer service of public organizations. They draw their conclusions from case studies of two UK government organizations and state that Lean has the potential of improving the internal processes but that it remains uncertain how to transform these internal improvements into improvements for the external users. Another management model derived from the business sector that has been studied when applied in a public setting is Total Quality Management (TQM) as Lin and Ogunyemi (1996) examine the implementation of the model in the US federal public service. They conclude that a successful implementation of TQM-programs in public service is dependent on well-defined quality objectives, a high technological advancement and a well-developed understanding of the clients' requirements.

Another recurring theme in the obtained literature is the so-called e-government: different ways for public organizations to digitally connect with their users. An example of a study of e-government has been conducted by Åkesson and Edvardsson (2008), a study with the intention to analyse the effects of e-government on service design as perceived by the employees. From their study Åkesson and Edvardsson conclude that e-government seemingly has decreased the pressure on the employees, as some parts of the

organization's services have been moved to the clients. However, they also emphasize that it is difficult to say how many clients that actually use the websites without any assistance, something that makes the pressure-relief of the employees uncertain. (There is an extensive literature on e-government, see for instance Kennedy, Coughlan & Kelleher 2010; Reinsalu 2006; Atkinson & Leigh 2003 and Shareef, Archer & Dwivedi 2015)

In this study I am also interested in the public servants' response to market-inspired reforms. Do the studies referred to above, say anything about how the employees react to the reforms inspired by the market and the world of business? Walker et al. (2011) conclude that the market-orientation strategies, although having a positive effect on the citizens perception of public service performance, seem to have little impact on the actual performance of the employees. They conclude that it is plausible that public servants are not "enamoured" with market-orientation reforms, this due to market orientation highlighting service rather than more traditional aspects of public administration. In Radnor and Johnston's (2013) study of the adoption of Lean-management in public organizations they mention that they could detect a rather consistent view among the employees that an increased focus on the organization's clients and their needs is to be considered a crucial ingredient in Lean if it is to succeed. But a, for this dissertation, noteworthy reflection by the authors is that the interviewed senior managers at HM Revenue & Customs refer to their clients as "customers", while frontline staff instead prefer to refer to them as "tax payers". According to Radnor and Johnston the frontline staff feels that the notion of "customers" is inappropriate to use as "...customers have a choice of service providers and tax payers do not" (Radnor & Johnston 2013: 909). They also found that senior management of the organization under study refer to colleagues, other departments and other offices as "internal customers", a notion that few among the frontline staff tend to use. Radnor and Johnston state that these ambiguities concerning the notion of customers that they detect within the organizations, as well as the uncertainties regarding the answer to who the customers of the organizations really are, actually constitute an important aspect to why Lean-management does not seem to create any real and noticeable user-value.

3.3.3.2 Studies of customer orientation in the public sector

There are, however, also studies that focus specifically on the customer orientation of public organizations, which also implies the re-characterization of the public service users into customers. van der Hart (1990) explores what customer orientation means for public organizations in the Netherlands and he finds that it has brought with it an increased attention to quality, a need for a

more business-like attitude and the allocation of authority to lower levels of the organizations (i.e., a need to move the decisions closer to the citizens). He concludes that customer orientation is “very useful and necessary” for public organizations, but he also adds that to be useful, the organizations must define the contents of customer orientation as well as “indicate exactly” who they are referring to when talking about “the customer”.

Cheung (2005) is more pessimistic about the usefulness of customer orientation in public management when presenting the results of his study. His focus of attention is placed on eighty so-called performance pledges that were introduced into the public services of Hong Kong, performance pledges that were aiming at ensuring best possible service and at “engender a culture of service that regards the public as customers”. After analysing the pledges he concludes that these performance pledges, and the customer-orientation approach that they were aiming to ensure, mainly seem to serve the purpose of management. In other words they seem to be standard texts that has been produced to comply with government requirements, or as he puts it: “...just another management exercise that takes the customer role as peripheral if not a superficial one” (Cheung 2005: 361).

There are also several studies focusing on how public servants react to the customer orientation reforms of the organization where they work. Rosenthal and Peccei (2006) interview frontline employees in 14 offices at Jobcentre Plus, an employment and benefit government agency in the UK, with the aim to analyse the frontline staffs’ reaction to the agency’s reform to “re-label” their users as “customers”, instead of calling them “client”, “jobseeker” or “unemployed”. The authors believe a study of staff perceptions concerning this reform is an interesting test for the customer concepts’ “meaning and visibility” in public service. The change in language was initiated with the intention to change the image of the public servants and to improve the relationship between the public servants and the public. Based on the results the authors conclude that this reform seems to be a success, as many of the interviewees have endorsed the reform. A success that the authors believe is due to the change in language being “...embedded in wider transformations of structures, practices and the physical environment” (Rosenthal & Peccei 2006: 75). At the same time the study also indicates some amount of ambiguity concerning the concept of having customers in this setting, for instance the interviewed employees seem to have conflicting definitions of the concept and the talk about the “customer” is often full of contradictions: “The customer in Jobcentre Plus is, inescapably, far from a sovereign figure, but rather is a complex and contradictory figure” (Rosenthal & Peccei 2006: 76).

A similar result is also presented by Needham (2006) as she undertakes interviews and document analysis of the UK central government as well as eight local authorities. In the interviews public servants were asked what they think it means to treat people as customers. In the answers, Needham identifies five different conceptions, the most common being that it means to personalize services around the individual. Other meanings the respondents express are giving clients a choice of services, treating clients with courtesy and respect and to improve clients' access. Needham's conclusion is that the respondents seem to apply their own understanding of the concept, rather than coherent models, this despite "talk of establishing common 'behaviors'". She believes that two principal advantages could be identified with the use of the "language of the customer; first, it helps to build a certain culture or mindset, and second, it facilitates for the authorities to live up to the public expectations. Her primary reflection around treating the public service users as customers is however the "inconsistency in its interpretation" and she warns for potential ambiguities and limitations and suggests that any customer-oriented strategies should be paused until its "...desirability for public services is more firmly established" (Needham 2006: 858).

Yet another study with a similar result is presented by Clarke et al. (2007) as they examine the "re-branding" of the public service users and ask how this might affect the relationship between the state and the citizen. They examine three different UK public services and find that the employees often associate the term "customer" with the payment of services, at the same time as it is considered impersonal. Interviewees (especially from the police and the social care) also often highlight the fact that many of the persons they meet while at work are not "customers" by choice. The authors also find, similar to what has been reported in other studies, that terms like consumer and customer often are more commonly embraced by employees on management positions than by frontline staff.

Paarlber (2007) examines the effect customer orientation has on employees' performance and motivation at the US Department of Defence. She sets up several hypotheses from a literature review and tests them on survey and interview data. Her findings suggest that customer orientation really has a strong positive effect on employees' performance and motivation. The concept, she states, has had a positive effect especially for those employees that do not directly see how their work contributes to the organizational goals. She emphasizes that developing a customer orientation is a complex social process and the question about who the customer is in this context may create a conflict between managers and employees. She also underscores the importance of middle management connecting the employees with the strategic

goals of the organization. Although identifying some challenges she sees a great potential in customer-oriented approaches and she believes the concept is "...unlikely to disappear from public management practice any time soon" (Paarlberg 2007: 226).

The concept of customer orientation has also been applied in the field of education, something that has been noted by many scholars. May students be considered to be customers? Lomas (2007) explores this issue and asks how academic staff respond to this question. She interviews staff in six UK universities and finds that there is a distinct difference between the interviewed staffs' perception of the students and the UK government's. The UK government, she states, has encouraged universities to adopt systems and structures similar to the ones in the commercial sector and inspired the universities to become customer oriented, while the lecturers reject the view of the students as customers. Pitman (2000) performs a similar study as he surveys the administrative staff of an Australian university to find out if they perceive academics and students as customers. His findings show that the administrative staff has ambivalent feelings towards academics as customers whereas they perceive students as "internal customers". In a study by Vouri (2013) the focus is instead on the university students in Finland and how they feel about being labelled as customers. Her findings display feelings of dislike (due to, for instance, linking the word customer to profit maximization, considered an improper way to discuss higher education) as well as feelings of acceptance (due to, for instance, an increased bargain power for students over faculty).

Health care is also a field in which the organizations frequently have applied the concept of customer orientation. This has caused scholars to explore the patient viewed as a customer. For instance, Mazurenko, Zemke and Lefforge (2016) studies whether a hospital has customers according to patients and healthcare employees. By performing semi-structured interviews in focus groups, they find that the perception of the customer notion differs depending on what group you ask. Patients does not seem to consider themselves as customers. Nurses are more split with a majority considering the patient as a customer, while administrators overwhelmingly view patients as customers. Physicians, on the other side, consistently oppose the idea of the patient as a customer, an opinion often motivated by patients lacking the expertise to make optimal choices.

Seibel et al. (2014) also explore the notion of customer in health care, this by analysing terminally ill patients' view on themselves as customers. They find that the conventional idea of the customer in many ways does not match the self-presentation of people in palliative care; the palliative patient cannot

withdraw from the physician's authority in decision-making. But, there are also overlaps between the customer role and the patient role; the patient, just as the customer, requests a responsive, person-centred and individualized treatment.

In a study by Whelan et al. (2010) the empirical context is a public hospital in Ireland and the study is focusing on the employees and their perceptions of organizational customer orientation. By performing group discussions followed up by a questionnaire the study reveal that the frontline employees do not associate the hospital management's policy on customer orientation with how they believe the concept should be applied within healthcare, and Whelan et al. call for more research on the issue:

Further work needs to explore the possibility that customer orientation, as defined in the commercial sector, is either not appropriate to the public sector, or that examples are necessary where the transfer of such ideas has worked (Whelan et al. 2010: 1170)

3.3.3.3 Studies of the customer orientation of coercive public organizations

Of special interest for this dissertation is research that has been focusing on the customer orientation of coercive public organizations, as the case organization of this study may be categorized as a coercive public organization. Many public organizations sometimes have to apply coercive measures towards citizens but what does the academic literature say about combining customer orientation with coercive measures? An example of a coercive public activity is policing. Drummond et al. (2000) study the potential of market-orientation strategies in police organizations (market orientation is then defined as the implementation of "the marketing concept", a concept that the authors mean implies that business success comes from understanding and meeting the customers' needs). They draw their conclusions from a comparison of three different organizations; the AOC Inland Revenue, the New York Police Department (NYPD) and Richer Sounds (a private org. hi-fi retailer). In this multi-case study they use semi-structured interviews and observe operational activities. They conclude that all three organizations may be labelled as customer oriented, and the authors believe that they can detect "turnaround strategies" in the two public sector organizations (AOC and NYPD), meaning that the organizations have aimed at going from an internal focus to becoming more customer focused. They also report about two "interesting phenomena" related to the two public organizations of the study. The first one is, what they call, "the syndrome of unwilling/reluctant customers"; both AOC and NYPD consider a high quality of service as an effective way to meet reluctant

customers. The other interesting phenomenon they found was how an improvement of the internal service seems to facilitate the external customer service. Another study focusing on policing has been performed by Baker and Hyde (2011) as they have examined the South Australian Police (SAPOL)'s strategy to be customer focused. In their conclusions they state that the customer focus for SAPOL has been an important factor enabling the organization to improve its service delivery. According to Baker and Hyde a key to the success of the SAPOL's customer focus is the organization's strategy to provide the customers with the service they need – but not the service the customers' say they need. Instead the customers' service need was to be determined by the professionals.

Collecting tax is another public activity that might require coercive measures. Customer orientation and tax enforcement may at first seem contradictory, nevertheless several tax enforcement organizations all over the world have started to aim at becoming customer oriented. Aberbach and Christensen (2007) search for the driving forces behind customer orientation initiatives in tax administration by performing a comparative analysis of the tax administration of Norway and USA. They search specifically for possible dilemmas and effects following from balancing control and coercion with customer orientation. For instance, they analyse the strategic plans of the Norwegian tax agency and find that the agency for a long time has been seen as “rigid and introverted” and having a “large, bureaucratic and ineffective organization”. The strategy plan for the agency states that it is time for a change. Therefore Aberbach and Christensen believe that the customer orientation of the Norwegian tax agency first and foremost has been initiated by internal actors, but that it also been influenced by international trends (such as NPM). The American tax agency, The Internal Revenue Service (IRS), is also reported to have gone through an extensive change, mainly influenced by international reforms but also by national political pressure, as tax policies are a very controversial political subject in the US and “consumerism” having deeper roots in the culture.

In a study by Tuck, Lamb and Hoskin (2011) the authors analyse how the UK tax administration, the Inland Revenue (IR, nowadays “HM Revenue & Customs”), re-characterised its clients from “taxpayers” to “customers”. The study's conclusions are drawn from semi-structured interviews with IR officials and analysis of official authority documents. The authors identify some “problems, dilemmas and ambiguities” of the re-characterization of the IR users. Besides introducing customer-focus some new practices were introduced; a customer segmentation strategy, CRM approaches, Total Quality Management and customer surveys. According to Tuck, Lamb and Hoskin

these are practices that enabled the management of the IR to legitimise the use of the customer notion. From their study the authors conclude that the management somehow tried to reconstruct the taxpayer into a “customer in a fuller sense” with the intention to make it easier to develop and implement a customer-focus.

Then how about the employees, what does the public servants employed by coercive public organizations think about and relate to the concept of customer orientation? From the studies referred to above one can for instance find that Drummond et al. (2000) underscore that an important factor enabling the transformation of the organizations they studied was a big staff-commitment to change and a willingness among the employees to commit to managerial strategies. This in turn was something the authors mean was a result of a strong leadership with a clear communication and a problem-solving approach. Baker and Hyde (2011) for their part say that they among the employees of the South Australian Police could identify a number of “cultural barriers”, for instance that the police officers seem to think that it is unacceptable to classify the prisoners as “customers” and such an initiative could, according to the authors, lead to conflicts that risk undermining the organization’s strive to be “customer focused”. Aberbach and Christensen (2007) rhetorically ask, after their study of customer-orientation initiatives within tax administration, whether “service and coercion can coexist successfully in tax collection?” and whether tax collectors “can treat most ‘customers’ with respect, providing them with helpful information and making it as easy as possible to meet their obligations, while still taking firm measures to ensure compliance”? (p. 178). The answer they come up with, is a distinct “yes”. This is an answer they mean is supported by their examination of the Norwegian tax administration in where the change in strategy does not seem to have been very controversial within the organizations even though the authors can report about a “minor internal tension between jurists and more service-related personnel”. Tuck, Lamb and Hoskin (2011) report about some internal resistance in the re-characterization of the UK tax administration’s clients from “tax payers” to “customers” something that was discovered by the fact that IR senior managers often had to argue about the appropriateness of the term “customer”.

One may also find studies focusing specifically on public servants’ reactions to different customer-orientation initiatives in coercive public organizations. One such study focusing on police officers is performed by Westmarland (2010) in which she aims at resolving if police officers consider themselves to be involved in a customer-like relationship with the citizens. From analysing the answers from the police officers, she detected, similar to what has been reported in other studies as seen above, a disparity between senior officers and

frontline staff regarding this concept and she even reports that senior officers warned her, prior to her study, that she "...might find some cynicism or resistance in the ranks" (Westmarland 2010: 295). Her findings indicated that senior officers believe that it has been beneficial to let local citizens to a larger degree influence the organization's planning processes while the frontline officers seem to be more negative towards this idea. Westmarland considers this being because "co-production of policing" means giving up some power, and that the frontline officers consider themselves having a professional power that they know best how to use and therefore do not want to share. In a similar manner Korunka et al. (2007) study the employees of the tax authorities of Austria and USA to measure their level of perceived customer orientation following NPM-inspired reforms. The authors find that the reforms have led to an increased level of perceived customer orientation among the employees in both studied organizations, but they also assert that customer orientation when applied in these kinds of organizations often requires major cultural transformations that cannot be implemented in a short period of time.

3.4 Summary of Chapter 3

In this chapter I have presented the current knowledge in relation to the topic of the study. I began by claiming that the increased hybridity of public organizations may be seen as the result of a broad reform movement that has swept over public management, and I presented how this reform movement may be described as a move between two modes of managing: from bureaucracy to entrepreneurialism. As seen in in this chapter these different modes are to some extent built on opposing ideas on how public organizations ought to be managed. Bureaucracy is a mode of managing that brings out a hierarchical way of organizing and a strict division of labour (Christensen et al. 2005; Olsen 2006; Styhre 2009), while entrepreneurialism give emphasis to a flexible way of organizing, preferable structured in teams (Osborne & Gaebler 1992). Bureaucracy is also focusing on objectivity and the equal, and legally accurate, handling of *cases*. Entrepreneurialism is more focused on output and advocates performance measurement and a more adaptable *customer-oriented* way of meeting the clients. These different modes also send different signals on how to act and behave to the individuals inhabiting the organizations. One could, in other words, talk about the modes having different underlying rationalities. Bureaucracy may, for instance, be said to imply that the employees should follow precedent, that they should be process focused

and act standardized and objective. Entrepreneurialism, on the other side, signals to the employees to be adaptable, to focus on the customers and output.

In this chapter I have also presented a brief review of the literature on organizational hybridity. From the research on organizational hybridity, we learn that organizational hybridity may be challenging due to that it implies that the organizations are exposed to competing pressures. Organizations may respond to this by strategically and purposefully combining elements of the different pressures (Pache & Santos 2013) or by developing a new common organizational identity that are balancing the hybridity (Battilana & Dorado 2010). Another type of response on the organizational level is to separate, or decouple, the demands that come with the hybridity into different organizations, units, departments or professions and thereby avoiding the potential clashes of demands (Baker 2013; Binder 2007; Segnestam Larsson & Alexius 2019). On an employee level it has been reported how employees may respond to competing pressures of hybridity by holding on to traditional values and a traditional professionalism (Reay & Hinnings 2009). Other studies show that employees, as a response to the multiple pressures of hybridity, may turn to developing a new hybrid professional identity (Nordstrand Berg & Pinheiro 2016; Meyer et al. 2014; Hendrix & van Gestel 2016). I also presented some of the findings of the literature that has examined the interplay between the levels, in where both Reissner (2019) and Bévort and Suddaby (2016) have shown how organizational hybridity on an organizational level affects the individuals and to some extent restricts their view on the organizations and their professional identities but that they nevertheless have a high degree of individual agency.

In the last part of the chapter I explored customer orientation, as I in this study organizational hybridity from the point of view of public sector customer orientation. The customer orientation of public organizations thus constitutes the empirical phenomenon that I study to explore hybridity. I began by examining the origin of customer orientation and the reasons why it has been highlighted as an important principle for organizations, how it first appeared as an element of the Scientific management movement and later was incorporated into the field of marketing with Levitt's influential book *Marketing myopia* (Levitt 1960/2008). In this book Levitt argued that business organization ought to focus on customers' needs to achieve success. This is also how customer orientation often is understood: as an organizational aim to understand the customers' needs and be responsive to those needs, a response that should be aimed at creating "customer-value" (Narver & Slater 1990; Appiah-Adu & Singh 1998). Moreover, customer orientation is often associated with cultural values, and it is often claimed that these values must

permeate the customer-oriented organization. Customer orientation is often considered as difficult to implement and a literature review have shown that the response among the employees often is characterized by ambivalence and a balance act between giving in to the ideas embedded in customer orientation or to avoid them, whereas in organizations with employees firmly anchored in in professional norms the employees are likely to be reluctant (Sturdy 1998). Customer orientation has, as also presented in earlier chapters, not only been applied within the market setting but also public organizations today claim to be customer oriented. In this chapter I have also looked at how customer orientation has been understood in public management, and it has, just as within a market setting, often been considered as an organizational approach of understanding and, to varying extent, respond to those needs. An important aspect for public organization's that adopt customer orientation is the re-characterization of the citizen into a "customer" and in this chapter I have briefly looked into the notion of customers and what that notion might imply, and even though the notion is associated with many various connotations a "customer" is often considered as a rational and competent character that knows what s/he needs. I have in this chapter also looked at the critique that has been directed towards customer orientation when it has been applied within public management. Often this critique takes its starting point in the connotations of the notion of customers: the notion is often claimed to imply that public values is neglected and it is often said to signal a different set of expectations for both the organization and for the public service user (e.g., Clarke et al. 2007; Aberbach & Christensen 2005). Some criticisers even claim that the protection of social justice and equality risk being replaced by a catchy slogan such as "putting the customers first" (Aberbach & Christensen 2005).

The chapter then continued with a review of earlier empirical research on public management customer orientation, a review that opened with some topics that are closely related to this projects' topic: the application of market orientation in public service and the application of different management modes applied to public organizations. These are topics that are subjected to a lot of research and the studies presented here are, of course, only a scratch on the surface. Nonetheless, these are topics that to a large extent focuses on the same issues and problems as this research project, namely how strategies and programs derived from the market and the business sector may be applied within public management and what this result in for the organizations, their employees and their clients. The results from the reviewed studies are ambiguous and they indicate that there might be organizational benefits at the same time as they sometimes report about internal scepticism and uncertainties concerning actual user-value. The literature that is focusing specifically on

when the customer orientation is applied within public management may also, as seen, be categorized as rather ambiguous. Often it is reported about an internal resistance (or at least scepticism) among the employees (e.g., Whelan et al. 2010; Lomas 2007; Mazurenko 2016). Often the frontline employees seem to have difficulties considering the clients as “customers”, as they primarily associate the notion of customers with the customers of the commercial sector. The often-reported disparities between how management employees and frontline employees relate to customer orientation is also indicating that the application of customer orientation in public management might result in organizational tensions (Clarke et al. 2007; Westermarland 2010; Tuck, Lamb & Hoskin 2011). At the same time, we may also find “success-stories” reporting about how customer orientation has been embraced by the employees, how the approach may build a certain culture or mind-set that may facilitate for public organizations to live up to public expectations (Drummond et al. 2000). It is also reported that customer orientation in the public sector might increase public servants’ performance and motivation (Rosenthal & Peccei 2006). Customer orientation is also described as an effective “turnaround strategy”, a strategy that is helping rigid and introverted organizations to become more responsive towards their clients (Drummond et al. 2000; Aberbach & Christensen 2007).

Thus, the literature review indicates that many questions concerning the application of customer orientation in the public sector remains uncertain. In this study a special focus is placed on the frontline public servants and how they relate to and cope with the market-inspired idea of customer orientation. I believe, as mentioned, that the frontline public servants are key-players when it comes to giving us better understanding of the practical application of market-inspired approaches in the public sector; they are the ones that will meet the “customers”; they are the ones that must leave the abstract and theoretical and, in their work, actually manage the possibly conflicting elements following from this “hybrid-state”. The frontline public servants might also create a conflict in case they are sceptic or reluctant and thereby undermine the possible positive results that come from a management strategy. Knowledge about how they handle a strategy is thereby essential if wanting to achieve a successful implementation.

4 The institutional logics perspective

The aim of this study is to understand the organizational and individual response to organizational hybridity, the hybridity of public organizations that adopt market-inspired elements. When I analyse the case of this study, I apply a theoretical perspective called the institutional logics perspective. The institutional logics perspective is a theoretical perspective that researchers often turn to when trying to understand organizational and/or individual behaviour in environments shaped by different, and possibly even opposing, pressures. The perspective has earlier been applied in, for instance, research investigating how chefs in France managed the nouvelle cuisine movement alongside the classical cuisine (Rao, Monin & Durand 2003), how medical-professionals coped with the introduction of a new business-like health care (Reay & Hinings 2009), how environmental managers handled the dual objective of having to care for the natural environment, while also having to deal with market-based pressures (Dahlmann & Grosvold 2017), and how public organizations and their employees managed NPM and market-inspired ideas alongside the more traditional demands imposed on public entities (Bjerregaard 2011; Nordstrand Berg & Pinheiro 2016; Meyer & Hammerschmid 2006). In this chapter I will present the institutional logics perspective, its origins and how it is conceptually structured, closing the chapter with describing the concept of *institutional complexity*.

4.1 The origin of the perspective

The institutional logics perspective originates from a text by Friedland and Alford (1991) in which the authors state:

The central institutions of contemporary capitalist West – capitalist market, bureaucratic state, democracy, nuclear family, and Christian religion – shape individual preferences and organizational interests as well as the repertoire of behaviors by which they may attain them. These institutions are potentially contradictory and hence make multiple logics available to individuals and organizations (Friedland & Alford 1991: 232)

The concept of “institutional logics” has been further developed and is now often defined in accordance with Varpio et al.’s (2017) definition. It defines institutional logics as:

...the socially constructed, historically developed pattern of beliefs and rules that shape the organizing principles of an institution. It provides a set of norms for an organization and for the individuals who work therein (Varpio et al. 2017: 2)

A similar definition is offered by Thornton and Ocasio (1999) when they state that institutional logics provide institutional actors with both formal and informal rules. They also say that these rules “...constitute a set of assumptions and values, usually implicit, about how to interpret organizational reality, what constitute appropriate behaviour, and how to succeed” (Thornton & Ocasio 1999: 804). Aagaard (2016) views the concept from a similar starting point while adding that institutional logics also influence the social identities of individuals. The definition of institutional logics that I adhere to in this study is consistent with the above-mentioned: I consider the institutional logics of the organization under study to be the pattern of ideas and rules that shape the organization’s priorities, practices and decisions. I also consider that the logics influence the professional identities of the individuals within the organization, identities that form the behaviours and preferences of the individuals.

The ideas that originally were presented by Friedland and Alford may be linked to, inter alia, Meyer and Rowan’s (1977) and DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) variants of institutional theory. These theories have been labelled “neo-institutional theories”. They are theories explaining how environmental impact is resulting in organizational and cultural homogeneity. Meyer and Rowan (1977) claimed that structural similarities of organizations are a result of the organizations’ efforts to conform to cultural myths and symbols in the

institutional environment, an act that would endorse public legitimacy and, thereby, organizational survival. They concluded that organizational success was most likely if an organization *decoupled* externally derived pressures of, for instance, how to be structured from internal activities. In other words, created a gap between formal policies and actual practices, which thus would function as a kind of defence mechanism against conflicting expectations. DiMaggio and Powell (1983), for their part, claimed that organizations homogenize in a process they called isomorphism, a process being driven more by the structuration of other organizations in the same environment than by competition and need for efficiency. The institutional logics perspective differs, however, from the abovementioned neo-institutional theories as it not only explains organizational homogeneity but also heterogeneity (Thornton, Ocasio & Lounsbury 2012: 44-45). Both neo-institutional theories and the institutional logics perspective thus emphasize cultural impact but the perspectives differ, the former focus on a single (dominating) culture while the latter instead focus on *multiple logics*.

4.2 The conceptual structure of the perspective

According to Friedland and Alford (1991) institutional logics operate at multiple levels; the societal-, the organizational-, and the individual level, and the societal level is always permeated by multiple institutional logics full of potential contradictions. As seen above, Friedland and Alford argued that “contemporary capitalist west” was permeated by five “central institutions”: *capitalist market, bureaucratic state, democracy, nuclear family, and Christian religion*. Each one of these, which also may be labelled as institutional orders, may thus be considered to constitute a governance system, a frame of reference for the actors to understand their environment. In Thornton et al.’s words they are “...the root system and metaphors through which individuals and organizations perceive and categorize their activity and infuse it with meaning and value” (p.54). Each one is further composed out of a content, a rule set, which for organizations and individuals will manifest as routines, habits and conventions (Alvehus 2021: 27).

One way to illustrate institutional logics is to place the institutional orders on a horizontal X-axis. On a vertical Y-axis one may then place the content specific to the corresponding institutional order. Hence, this illustrates how each institutional order is associated with elemental categories that influence how organizations are structured, how they allocate their resources and how

they communicate. They also influence the identities of individual actors and how they understand their reality. Thus, the institutional logics may be said to be composed out of institutional orders (columns on the X-axis) and its content – the elemental categories (rows on the Y-axis). Researchers applying the perspective often return to earlier established logics with more or less the same content, such as for example a logic of the market (as in e.g., Nordstrand Berg & Pinheiro 2016; Dahlmann & Grosvold 2017; Thornton 2002; Wei 2017), a logic stating that the *customers* must be in focus and propagating market competition, or a logic of bureaucracy (as in e.g., Bévort & Suddaby 2016; Binder 2007; Meyer et al 2014), a logic most often characterized by formalized frameworks and legal rationality. However, any number of different logics can of course be identified, and as established by Alvehus (2021: 20), the importance is to consider whether the identified logics are useful for the analysis or not. The literature on hybridity therefore include many different logics that may be identified as important to the particular context that is examined.

Below I demonstrate the institutional logics system by showing how a bureaucratic logic could be illustrated (Table 4.1). “Bureaucracy” then constitute the institutional order placed on the X-axis. It is the heading of the logic that frames the elemental categories that are placed on the Y-axis. Thus, the elemental categories make up the content of the logic. In the example below, the elemental categories have been taken from Chapter 3 in where I portrayed the bureaucratic mode of managing public organizations.

Table 4.1. An example of how an institutional logic, a “logic of bureaucracy”, may be illustrated.

X-axis. The institutional order: “Bureaucracy”	
Y-axis. The elemental categories:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “All employees should follow the hierarchical order”
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Rules and legal frameworks should govern the work
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “All cases should be handled equally”
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • etc. etc.

The institutional logics should not be considered as static, instead the institutional logics may evolve and change over time. Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury (2012) underscore that language plays a great part in the change of institutional logics: “Language, embodied in theories, frames, and narratives, and embedded in vocabularies of practice, provides a critical linchpin by which institutional logics are constructed and meanings and practices are brought together” (p.150). Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury (2012: 161 ff.) mean that institutional logics can change through a transformation process and through a developmental process. A transformational change implies a more radical change process while a developmental change means that a majority of the prevailing practices and symbolic representations remain. As will be presented below there are a wide range of ideas on how institutional logics transform or in other ways interact with other logics.

4.2.1 How institutional logics influence individuals

According to the institutional logics perspective, an individual’s values and behavioural patterns are embedded in institutional logics. This might seem to implicate institutional constraints. But, the perspective rejects a pure structural deterministic view, instead the perspective offers opportunities for change while at the same time also acknowledging some institutional and structural constraints. According to the perspective the institutional actors most often reproduce behaviours consistent with leading institutional logics, but an important aspect of the perspective is also that it allows the actors to disregard the logics. In other words: the institutional logics perspective includes features that explain a partial autonomy of institutional actors from the social and cultural structure.

Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury (2012: 78 ff.) propose a model for how institutional actors are influenced and affected by institutional logics. First of all, they underscore that one always must consider the immediate situation’s characteristics: the social context and interactions of the situation. They also assume that individuals’ actions depend on the availability, accessibility, and activation of cultural knowledge. Applied to the institutional logics perspective this implies that individuals, by social interactions and socialization, can be influenced by a multiplicity of institutional logics. According to Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury (2012: 95 ff) an individual’s awareness of institutional logics is available in a long-term memory and may be applied for sense making and decision-making. If an individual has multiple logics available in her/his memory, s/he has the potential of choosing between different logics depending on situation. Different individuals influenced by different institutional logics

are likely to activate different behavioural patterns when confronted with the same situation, as long as the situation is congruent with the accessible logics. An individual that is deeply embedded in a particular prevailing institutional logic is likely to apply a behavioural pattern that is consistent with the prevailing logic, while an individual that has been exposed to several different organizational contexts is less likely to take for granted the prevailing institutional logic of his/her current institution. Instead s/he is more prone to exploit different opportunities.

As has been indicated above the notion of social identity is vital when trying to understand how individuals react to the influence of institutional logics. For as stated by Meyer et al. (2014: 863): “Identity work is seen as providing the link between macro and micro level: between institutional orders, field-level meaning, and the sense-making of individual human actors”. Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury (2012), for their part, mean that theories and frames may be influenced by institutional logics, and that theories and frames then shape narratives, and that narratives, in its turn, create legitimacy and construct social identities. Skelcher and Smith (2015: 445) also emphasize “actor identity” as an important feature of the institutional logics perspective since identities are normative frames for the actors’ behaviours. Meyer et al. (2014) also emphasize that it is important to distinguish between the concept of self-identity and the concept of social identity, as the latter is the identity an actor forms as a result of a membership in a social group. The members of the group may then activate a particular social identity in a particular social situation and the prevailing institutional logics within the group (or institution) provide the actors with a frame of reference that forms the social identity (unlike a person’s self-identity that always is embedded in multiple logics). The social identities of a work-organization may also be termed “professional identities”. Professional identity refers to the way that professionals see themselves in terms of who they are and what they do within the (work-) organization. The professional identities of the employees are thus more or less anchored in the prevailing institutional logics of the organization in which they work.

4.3 The concept of institutional complexity

Scholars used to assume that organizations always acted coherently when exposed to external institutional pressures, and based on this assumption many scholars came to conceptualize on how organizations, in striving to conform to their environment, responded with either active resistance or passive

conformity to external pressures (e.g., DiMaggio & Powell 1983; Thornton 2002). As a result, organizational research that was set to explore responses to multiple institutional pressures instead focused on a higher level of analysis: the organizational fields²⁹, rather than focusing on what happens within organizations. A lot of the field level research showed that a plurality of institutional logics may coexist in organizational fields, even though the fields most often are dominated by one logic. The fields are sometimes going through periods of imbalance (i.e. rivalry between incompatible logics) but as soon as the dominance of one of the logics is recognized, the field returns to a state of relative (temporarily) stability (Reay & Hinings 2005).

However, later studies also came to show that the idea of one logic eventually dominating a field, might be misleading and that competing institutional logics actually may coexist in a field over time (e.g., Reay & Hinings 2009; Greenwood et al. 2010; Dunn & Jones 2010; Goodrick & Reay 2011). More recent studies have come to complicate this picture even more. The idea that organizations always act coherently when exposed to external pressures has been overturned and instead scholars have been able to show how diverse institutional pressures seem to penetrate the very organizations. This has caused an increased interest in a state termed *institutional complexity* among organizational researchers, a concept describing a situation in where various and sometimes seemingly incompatible, and even competing, institutional logics permeate organizations, and as a result, the organizational members are confronted with a multiplicity of possible professional identities (e.g., Greenwood et al. 2010; Smets, Morris & Greenwood 2012; Skelcher & Smith 2015). Studies have also shown (e.g., Pache & Santos 2013; Battilana & Dorado 2010) that organizational hybridity is an indication that the organization may be influenced by multiple logics. Nordstrand Berg and Pinheiro (2016) for instance, state that hybridity indicates "...a combination of institutional logics that are not normally combined under one organizational roof or sub-unit" (p. 149). Scholars often underscore that dealing with institutional complexity may be difficult for organizations and the organizational members, who are the ones that ultimately must manage the coexistence of competing logics in the daily practice. However, there are also researchers claiming that institutional complexity barely is noticed on the street-level, a claim that according to Brandsen and Karré would indicate "...a

²⁹ An organizational field may according to DiMaggio and Powell (1983: 148) be defined as a set of organizations that "...in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resources and product consumers, regulatory agencies and other organizations that produce similar services or products".

surprisingly positive outcome, given the generally negative tone of the public debate on this type of organization” (Brandsen & Karré 2011: 833).

The concept of institutional complexity is often highlighted as an exciting area for research. So, what happens when organizations and their employees are exposed to multiple logics and institutional complexity?

One outcome of institutional complexity, according to research, is institutional change, i.e., that the previously dominant institutional logic, after a period of time, is entirely replaced by a new one (this outcome is thus more in accordance with the idea that institutional complexity is a temporarily state). This is, for instance, indicated by Rao, Monin and Duran (2003), and Zilber (2002). How come then that institutional complexity in some cases ends up in institutional change? Rao, Monin and Duran (2003) claim that the process of institutional change begins when activists create institutional gaps and then offer a new role identity that implies a new (or changed) dominant institutional logic. Reay and Hinings (2005) conclude from their study that a change from one dominant logic to another is a process including the purposeful actions of one key actor, an actor that has become dissatisfied with the status quo and therefore launches structural changes that support a new institutional logic. However, they also state that even though a new dominant logic might arise the old logic may remain as a strong “sub-logic” and continue to be an important factor. Institutional change might also be caused by “institutional carriers” – actors bringing with them a new logic when entering an institution, as for instance showed in a study by Zilber (2002).

But, numerous studies have also demonstrated that, despite the co-existence of different and sometimes competing logics, a (more or less) stable state of co-existence between logics may be maintained. One way the coexistence of logics is managed is through different types of *collaborations* between actors that are supporting different logics. Reay and Hinings (2009) aimed, with their research, to understanding how the individual actors, in their daily work, managed a situation with “rival logics”. In their study they found that the situation was resolved through an “uneasy truce”, i.e., a collaboration between actors that held on to different logics. A collaboration that thus facilitated for the different actors to maintain their independence (and keep holding on to their preferred logic) while still acting in an environment of multiple competing logics. A similar result has also been presented by Aagard (2016), although this study also indicates that collaboration not always is a successful strategy to manage institutional complexity, and that the actors sometimes must resort to strategies “beyond collaboration”.

Other responses to institutional complexity is different kinds of *balancing* of the coexisting logics. One such response is presented by Battilana and

Dorado (2010), who in their study showed that organizations could manage a state of being permeated by multiple, and to some extent conflicting, logics by developing an organizational identity that balanced between the different logics. A similar result, with actors balancing the different logics, has also been presented by Bjerregaard (2011) in a study which showed that individuals exposed to multiple logics sometimes must apply different strategies to “balance the requirements of the different logics”. Moreover, a response comparable to balancing has been presented by Arman, Liff and Wikström’s (2014), a study which indicates that a state of multiple coexisting logics is managed through a hierarchization of the logics, a response to institutional complexity that, according to the authors, masks the tensions between the logics.

Scholars sometimes also detect that actors may take selected elements of different logics and *combine* them. An often-cited example of this is a study by Pache and Santos (2013) that reports how organizations manage institutional complexity through a process they have termed “selective coupling” meaning that the organizations strategically could combine elements from the different logics. Andersson and Liff (2018) use the term “co-optation” to describe a response that they mean is somewhat similar to selective coupling (even though they focus on the individual level rather than the organizational level that Pache and Santos focus on). Similarly, it has in research also been described how actors may respond to institutional complexity by using logics as “tools” that they can choose from when they need to influence decisions. Actors are then, as implied by the tool-kits metaphor, said to have a “repertoire of logics” that may be manipulated or combined to serve the actors’ purposes. That actors may respond to institutional complexity in this way has for instance been suggested by McPherson and Sauder’s (2013). From their study they conclude that when used on the ground, logics are tools that can be brought out to resolve conflicts, frame solutions to practical problems, or legitimate calls for courses of actions.

Another, often reported, response to coexisting logics is what theoretically often is termed blending or hybridization of logics – when actors combine or integrate two or several logics. For instance, Nordstrand Berg and Pinheiro (2016) say that individuals that are infused with new logics not necessarily are leaving previous logics behind but rather are developing them further in hybridization. A similar result is also presented by Meyer et al. (2014) and in a study by Dahlman and Grosvold (2017) the authors found that some actors respond by blending the coexisting logics while others pursue a strategy of relating to the logics as if they coexist in principle but not in practice (and they thus in practice continued to be guided only by one logic).

In the literature it is also sometimes reported about a *loose coupling* of logics, i.e., that different logics can be separated to avoid tensions between the logics. Goodrick and Reay (2011), for instance, show how coexisting multiple logics may be separated into different practices and Nicolini et al. (2016) show that different logics may coexist in a field while still, in practice, remaining separated (and sometimes even work together in what the authors theoretically termed “institutional knots”). This is also reported in a study by Baker (2013) who can describe how tensions between the logics are resolved in accordance with the hierarchal structure of an organization, while Binder (2007) shows how different logics influence different employees of different departments within the same organization: “No one institutional logic is ‘matter of fact’ for everyone in the organization; rather several different logics are common-sensical for different organizational departments and their staff” (p. 568). In a similar way Alvehus (2021: 100 – 104) means that logics can be simultaneously loosely coupled, and tightly coupled (and even reinterpreted) depending on which level one looks.

Skelcher and Smith (2015: 440-441) propose that organizations may be sorted into one of five types depending on how they respond to coexisting logics: *segmented*, *segregated*, *assimilated*, *blended* and *blocked*. The four first types are different ways of accommodating a pluralism of logics within the organization while the last type (“the blocked hybrid”) represent a situation in where the organization have failed to resolve the tensions between competing logics and consequently leading to a state they call “organizational dysfunction”. See Table 4 below for an overview over Skelcher and Smith’s categorization.

Table 4.2 Categorization based on how organizations respond to institutional complexity. From Skelcher & Smith (2015: 440).

Category	Characteristics
Segmented	Functions oriented to different logics are compartmentalized within the organization
Segregated	Functions oriented to different logics are compartmentalized into separate but associated organizations
Assimilated	The core logic adopts some of the practices and symbols of a new logic
Blended	Synergistic incorporation of elements of existing logics into new and contextually specific logic
Blocked	Organizational dysfunction arising from inability to resolve tensions between competing logics

What examinations are the researchers of institutional complexity then calling for? What questions remain to be solved and how? Nordstrand Berg and Pinheiro (2016) suggest an increased focus on public organizations. This due to public sector reforms being characterised by increasing hybridity and thereby more often exposed to institutional complexity, a development that they mean still is poorly examined. Bjerregaard (2011) claims more research is needed that highlights the lower organizational levels in regard to how actors cope and work with accomplishing institutional change and stability. Similarly, Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury also wish for an increased micro-focus and recommend researchers to attend to practices and lived experiences and "...go inside organizations and understand how social interactions within firms shape understandings of institutional complexity as well as how strategic responses to such complexity are conceptualized and implemented" (Thornton, Ocasio & Lounsbury 2012: 175). They also call for more research on how institutional complexity affect the politics and strategic decision-making of organizations. It is sometimes also claimed that earlier studies lack an in-depth analysis of institutional complexity, and the use of participant observations is at times said to have been underutilized (see for instance Arman, Liff & Wikström 2014). With this study I hope to contribute to some of these aspects. My focus in this dissertation is set at organizational level (how organizations respond institutional complexity), as well as at the "micro-level", i.e., the individuals (the frontline employees that in their work practice have to deal with the institutional complexity and potentially conflicting institutional pressures of a public organization applying a market inspired concept).

4.4 Analysing the data with the institutional logics perspective

The study's starting point has been that the SEA is an organization that is exposed to multiple, and possibly incompatible, or even competing, logics because of the hybridity. Then, how to establish which logics an organization is exposed to? The question of how to empirically identify institutional logics has been explored by Reay and Jones (2016). They have reviewed empirical studies focusing on institutional logics and they conclude that there are many qualitative studies of institutional logics but few that explicitly discuss and describe the process of how to identify them. Reay and Jones (2016) provide us with a framework of different analytic techniques to qualitatively identify institutional logics. This is a framework based on procedures used in earlier

studies, a procedure or process they call “to capture”, capture like “to capture a phenomenon”, capture like to “engage the audience’s interest in a topic and phenomenon” or capture like “to paint a likeness of and reveal a phenomenon through thick description”. Reay and Jones (2016) describe three ways to empirically capture institutional logics: “pattern deducing”, “pattern matching” and “pattern inducing”. I have in this study applied a procedure best matching the category they call pattern inducing. This is a bottom-up approach, an analytical method that starts in raw data, and then moves between the data and the themes that emerge from the data. According to Reay and Jones (2016: 449) the procedure of pattern inducing starts with the gathering of empirical textual data (this could be in the form of documents, but also notes from observations or transcribed interviews). The process to capture logics then moves forward by analysing and coding/grouping the data “...in ways that show behaviour or beliefs guided by particular logics...” (Ibid.). After having found patterns and coded them into themes the next challenge for the researcher is to convince the reader that the themes that s/he has come up with, reflect the influence of a guiding logic(s). Reay and Jones emphasize that the researcher must “convince the reader” and show as much of the raw data as possible, and motivate how the themes reflect the data and how the data are associated with one or more logics. For instance, text segments may be taken directly from the research material and the researcher may also use tables, figures and diagrams to “bring facts into consciousness”.

I have, when searching for logics that permeate the SEA, started with the empirical textual data of field notes and organizational documents. Within this data I have searched for themes of demands of how the organization is supposed to prioritize and how it ought to be organized, demands of certain behaviours or performances and/or certain values or culture among the employees of the organization. In Chapter 5 I present these themes of demands as the organization’s main principles, principles as in “a guiding principle” (of which customer orientation is one). These principles, and the demands they present for the organization and its employees, is in Chapter 7 (the presentation of the analysis) categorized into two themes, which construct two different logics.

As seen above, the institutional logics make available “social identities” for the institutional actors. The social identities of a work-organization may also be termed “professional identities”. In an organization where multiple institutional logics coexist the employees must manage the state of “institutional complexity” and somehow navigate their sense of professional identity between and along with the different logics. A part of the analysis has therefore been dedicated to identifying the professional identities of the

enforcement officers, a process analogous to capturing institutional logics. However, in regard to the process of identifying professional identities I have started in observational data and transcribed interviews, to capture different themes that may be coded as professional identities.

4.5 Summary of Chapter 4

In this chapter I have presented the theoretical framework applied when analysing my case: the institutional logics perspective. I have presented how institutional logics usually is defined, and how I define institutional logics in this study; as the pattern of ideas and rules that shape the organization's priorities, practices and decisions. I also consider that the logics influence the professional identities of the individuals within the organization, identities that form the behaviours and preferences of the individuals.

I have in this chapter also presented how the perspective originated from a text by Friedland and Alford (1991) and how it may be linked to so-called neo-institutional theories (e.g., Meyer & Rowan 1977; DiMaggio & Powell's 1983). Furthermore, I described how it within the perspective is proposed that institutional logics operate at multiple levels – societal level, organizational level and individual actor level, and the institutional actors are embedded in the prevailing logics of their institutional level. I have also presented how a system of institutional logics should not be considered as static, but be seen as something that change and evolve over time. For instance, as a result of actors exposing that the existing logic(s) are ineffective as guide for action. Finally, I presented the concept of institutional complexity, a concept describing a state of two or more institutional logics coexisting within the same institution while being experienced as incompatible.

The institutional logics perspective is in this study applied to analyse organizational hybridity and to understand how organizations and individuals respond to the multiple pressures of hybridity. A step of the analysis will thus be to validate the assumption that the case organization is permeated by multiple, and to some extent competing, logics (thus in a state of institutional complexity), to explore the leading logics and what they imply (what demands they place on the organizational members etc.). Then the focus will be on how the organization respond to the coexistence of logics (organizational level), as well as how the employees cope with the coexistence of logics (individual actor level).

5 Hybridity at the SEA:

An organizational perspective

The aim of this study is to understand the response of public organizations, and frontline public servants, to the organizational hybridity that occurs when public organizations adopt market-inspired elements. The aim is achieved by examining public sector customer orientation and the case of the Swedish Enforcement Authority (SEA). I have been conducting this study while also being an employee of the SEA. I was hired by the organization in August 2009, and my employment was first located in an office in Tumba, outside Stockholm. I was hired as an aspiring enforcement officer, and I spent the first year alternating work with undergoing an educational program that eventually would make me an enforcement officer. In February 2013, I was also accepted as a PhD-candidate at Lund University, and thus since then, given the opportunity to attend the university's PhD-program, including conducting this research-project alongside my work at the SEA. At the time of writing, I am working at the authority's team for international recovery³⁰ at an office located in Sundbyberg, outside Stockholm.

Early on in my employment at the SEA, I was perplexed by how the organization, was aiming to be *customer oriented*. As a result, I began to wonder how public organizations, and not least the public servants, respond to the demands that customer orientation presents to them. Demands that they must manage alongside more traditional demands of public administration. For instance, demands to always be objective and impartial, and to strictly follow a legally regulated procedure. This was the inquiry that inspired me to the topic of this study. This inquiry has also, while conducting this research project, continued to come to my mind at times when I have been faced with complex situations in my work as an enforcement officer. One example of such an occasion was when I had been managing the case of an urgent sequestration (Swe. "kvarstad"), and I sat down to reflect on my workday. A day full of

³⁰ The team for international recovery is handling debtors that either live abroad or have assets abroad.

telephone conversations including a pushy applicant who called several times to ask about our measures taken, a defendant whose response was a mix of anger and despair, the legal officers of the authority who had assisted me with the several legal queries that I had during the day and, not least, the numerous other people that in various ways had been affected by the measures we had taken. As I reflected on my day, I wrote down a couple of reflections and queries: Had I been acting customer oriented during my workday, and had I been oriented towards the customers (and who had really been my customers?), or had my main focus been set on the law, and the requirement to be objective? Or had I actually been able to take all these demands in consideration?

My reflections from that day shed light on the complexity of hybridity from a frontline perspective; How the enforcement officers of the SEA must manage a multiplicity of coexisting demands in their daily work. Demands to maintain legal security and to always be objective, and the demands of customer orientation. This in an environment of many potential “customers” with diverse and sometimes opposing interests. Another aspect that also contributes to the complexity of the matter is the fact that the enforcement officers often have to deal with persons in intricate situations meaning that the officers must have a high level of sensitivity while also actually being the ones obliged to enforce coercive measures. This complexity, and its different outcomes, is something that I will return to, as it now is time to the step into the empirical setting of this study.

In this chapter (Chapter 5) and the next (Chapter 6), the case will be presented. Chapter 7 contains the analysis of the case and the research questions will be answered in Chapter 8.

In this first of the two empirical chapters, I have an organizational focus. It contains the empirical material that I will analyse to be able to explore the organization’s response to hybridity. In the first part of the chapter, I aim to shed light on how customer orientation is described and manifested at the SEA. Customer orientation is an approach that most often is associated with market organizations and business settings, an approach thus constituting the basis of the hybridity of the SEA. As there is no universal definition of customer orientation, I will start by presenting what the SEA considers to be implied by customer orientation, in other words what demands that come with the concept according to the SEA. In the second part of the chapter, I present five (other) guiding principles that may be detected in the authority’s communication. In other words, I then unravel what demands that coexist with the demands of customer orientation. But, first of all, I will introduce the case organization.

5.1 The case organization: The Swedish Enforcement Authority (SEA)

The SEA is a public organization administered by the Swedish state, it is an organization that by the Swedish government has been assigned to secure the funding of the public sector, prevent over-indebtedness, and work against economic crime (SFS 2016: 1333). The SEA is accordingly, as its English name suggests, mainly an enforcement organization rather than a service agency, but the organization also has some basic service obligations towards the citizens, obligations such as ensuring that contacting the authority is “smooth and easy”, that individuals receive the aid and support they need (“without delays”), and that the authority is accessible (SFS 2017: 900). In accordance with the Swedish constitution, the organization is also required to always be objective, impartial and legally accurate (SFS 1974: 152).

The modern history of the SEA began in 1965 when the organization was separated from the police and the prosecutor’s office and 81 local authorities were established, all subordinated to the Swedish Tax Agency (Skatteverket) (SOU 2003:97). The SEA remained as a part of the tax agency’s organization until 2006 when the authority was separated from the tax agency and became an autonomous and coherent organization (SEA 2018a). Today, the SEA has got about 2300 employees working in 32 offices throughout the country, approximately 67 % of the employees are women (56 % are women in management positions) and the average age is 43 (SEA 2021). Except for enforcement officers, there are also many legal practitioners and economists employed at the authority. Since a couple of years, the authority also has a rather large IT-department, in which many system-developers work. There are also customer-service personnel and communicators working for the authority. The authority has a budget of approximately 2 billion Swedish Kronor and is financed by taxes and fees (SEA 2019a).

The SEA is among the general public, most likely, primarily recognized for its role as a public debt collector as the organization is responsible for the enforcement of both public and private unpaid debts. The organization has the legal right to take coercive measures to collect unpaid debts, and the organization is also handling other types of enforcement operations that sometimes require that coercive measures must be taken towards its clients,

such as for instance evictions and repossessions of goods. The organization may thus be labelled as a coercive public organization³¹.

During the procedure of enforcement, the SEA is obliged to remain a neutral part and take into concern the interests of the applicant (the creditor) as well as of the defendant (the debtor). The enforcement of an unpaid debt most often starts with a demand of payment being sent to the debtor, and in case the debt remains unpaid, the authority is obliged to investigate whether the debtor has any income that may be attached, or other assets that may be subject to enforcement (i.e., seized and sold). In addition to the enforcement department the authority also has departments handling debt reliefs, summary proceedings and the supervision of bankruptcy processes (SEA 2018a).

As the SEA's assignments entails that its employees relatively often have to take measures that involve intrusions into peoples' lives, the employees are sometimes being subjected to threats and violence. During the year 2013, the same year as this research project was initiated, the employees reported 113 incidents of threats or violence, in the year 2017 a number of 213 incidents were reported and in the year 2018 the number of reported incidents of threats against the employees was 162 (Publikt 2019). When the Swedish National Council for Crime Preventions surveyed employees of several Swedish public entities about unlawful influence (harassment, threats, violence etc.) the results showed that approximately 61 % of the respondents at the SEA had experienced some kind of unlawful influence, thus revealing that the employees of the SEA are among the most exposed to unlawful influence of all Swedish public employees (Brå 2016).

The SEA and its activities have on several previous occasions been subjected to the interest of research. The title *Kronofogde* goes far back in time, thus; the work of *kronofogdar* has, in several studies, been the subject of historians (See e.g., Frohnert 1993 or Westerhult 1965). Furthermore, researchers focusing on contemporary organizations have taken an interest in the SEA. For instance, when Espersson (2010) in her PhD-dissertation focused on the organization as she explored a number of organizational changes that the SEA in Malmö went through during the beginning of the 21st century. Changes that were aiming to increase efficiency and included management by objectives and a new team organization. In her study, she examined what impact and consequences the organizational changes had on the authority and what they meant for bureaucratic principles and values within the organization. The conclusion she came to was that the changes resulted in growing efficiency

³¹ For a presentation of what constitutes a coercive public organization see Chapter 3, section 3.3.1.3.

rates, but not in a deinstitutionalization of bureaucratic principles. Instead, the new organizing principles were adapted to the bureaucratic order, and even came to reinforce the bureaucratic principles within the organization. Another researcher that has been interested in the SEA is Ivarsson Westerberg (1999) as he examined the organization's reform history. In his study, he identified four major organizational reforms, and he concluded that they all have resulted in the same outcome, namely increased centralization. He also claimed that the reforms all have made the authority more distanced from the debtors and, particularly interesting for this research project, he asserted that the distance has actually been further increased by the requirements on the authority to become more customer- and service oriented. Ivarsson Westerberg (1999: 41) also criticized the SEA's use of the customer notion and he called it absurd to refer to the debtors as customers as they are imposed to deal with the authority.

Another, for this research project, most relevant study of the SEA has been conducted by Sahlin-Andersson (1998). In her study, she examined the organizational changes of a "länskronofogdemyndighet" (a local authority prior the consolidation of the local offices into one coherent organization) during the years 1991-1992. The changes that were then implemented were, according to Sahlin-Andersson, characteristic for the time period: they were aiming for a greater local autonomy and for an increased customer orientation and they were based on the idea that a public authority was similar to any other organization. Sahlin-Andersson claimed that the employees quickly implemented the organizational changes, but that many of them also considered the changes somewhat problematic. However, she considered some friction in this kind of environment being unavoidable, as the organization must balance between its authoritarian role and its role as a part of the civil service. She also underscored that the SEA always must relate to its history as the public's perception of the organization is rooted in its authoritarian history.

5.2 The Customer orientation of the SEA

What makes the SEA an organization perfectly fitting as a case for this research project is, as indicated above, this public organization's strive to be customer oriented, thus constituting the hybridity of the organization. The customer orientation permeates the organization; one of the SEA's main strategies

proclaims that the authority should have the “customers’ focus”³², and the authority frequently uses the term “customers” in reference to its clients. The term “customer” is, for instance, used (in various forms and formulations) 69 times in the SEA’s annual report from 2017, and 129 times in the annual report from 2021, and searching for the word on the authority’s intranet results in more than 150 hits³³. The customer notion is applied in all types of organizational communication, and in job advertisements. At an employment-oriented social network, the authority claims that being employed as an enforcement officer entails “handling customer relations”. The authority has in its communication aspired to be “customer focused” or “customer oriented”, since at least the 1990’s. However, the approach came, according to the former director-general Eva Liedström Adler³⁴, to be highly prioritized in the organization’s strategies following a government bill from 2001 in which it was underscored that public authorities should be there for the citizens and act at their service. In an interview on the authority’s intranet prior to her withdrawal, Liedström Adler referred to the government bill³⁵ and proclaimed: “At that moment we started to ask ourselves how our actions affected the citizens, and the customer concept became prioritized. It was an important change that helped us become a humane and modern authority” (Intr. 05/06/2015)³⁶.

³² This is one of three overarching strategies, of which the two others are “we can do more with less” and “we improve”.

³³ Search using the Swedish term “kund” dated 08/06/2020.

³⁴ Eva Liedström Adler was the first director-general of the SEA, entitled “Rikskronofogde”, and she held the position between 2006 and 2015.

³⁵ In the interview it is not revealed which government bill she is referring to. However, in August 2001 the government presented a policy for public management in which it was specifically emphasized that all public activity should have a clear “citizen focus”, see Skr. 2000/01:151.

³⁶ In 2001, the year that the former general-director referred to, the SEA still was a part of the Swedish Tax Agency’s organization and consequently it must be assumed that the tax agency and its actions had significant influence over the SEA. The Swedish Tax Agency (In Swe. “Skatteverket”) is an organization often highlighted as a “success story” as it formerly was seen as a harsh and bureaucratic organization but today is highly ranked in reputation among the general Swedish public. In a book written by two employees of the agency it is proclaimed that implementing a “customer perspective” had a big influence on how the tax agency changed its reputation, a perspective that included that “taxpayers” became “customers”, a perspective that, according to the authors, led to that “...the ability to see the customer’s perspective...” (Stridh & Witterberg 2015: 25) started to emerge within the agency. The “customer perspective” of the Swedish Tax Agency started, according to the authors, with an event that attracted a lot of media attention: when tax officers in 1976 took famous director Ingmar Bergman to an interrogation. Bergman

Customer orientation, and the ability to have the “customers’ focus”, is also often highlighted by top managers of the SEA as an important guide for how the organization should work and be organized. Customer orientation is also often said to be the aim of, and cause for, diverse organizational changes, such as office relocations and educational initiatives (field notes). When examining the written communication of the SEA one also observes that customer orientation is stressed as an important instruction for how the organization should be organized as well as for how the employees should act and behave. The customer orientation of the authority is, in one way or another, detectable in a large share of the SEA’s written communication, however, it is especially highlighted in articles and notes published on the intranet and in strategy directions with a focus on the organization’s overall strategic approach, its approach towards external stakeholders, and its external, as well as internal, communication.

What does customer orientation mean and imply according to the SEA? When I have searched for the answer to this question, I have found that customer orientation, from how it is manifested and described by the SEA, could be limited to four main features: 1) To re-characterize the clients into “customers”, 2) to be responsive to the customers and their needs, 3) to create value for the customers and 4) to, when needed, adjust the customers. Translated into more tangible demands on how to act and behave, the customer orientation of the SEA first means that the authority’s clients ought to be treated, as well as actually referred to as, “customers”. Secondly, the authority, and its employees, should aim to be responsive to the customers and their needs. Thirdly, when meeting the customers, the aim should be to create a “value” (or even an “added value”). Finally, the customer orientation of the SEA enacts that the organization, and its employees, at times ought to adjust the customers mainly so that they (the customers) may change the situation they are in, instead of just being submissive to the reactions of the SEA. Below, I will go into detail with all these features of the customer orientation of the

claimed he felt so humiliated by the harsh intervention that he eventually left the country to live abroad. This started, the authors mean, a debate within the agency, a debate that eventually led to the implementation of the customer concept. The authors believe that changing the internal jargon from “taxpayers” to “customers” changed the employees’ perception of the citizens and the employees started to truly believe that all citizens wanted to fulfill their tax duties.

SEA, and present how these features are expressed in the organization's communication.

5.2.1 To re-characterize the clients into “customers”

The SEA constantly applies the term “customers” when describing the persons that are interacting with the organization, and this “re-characterization” of the organization's clients into customers may be argued to be the most evident manifestation of the customer orientation of the organization. The notion of customers is commonly applied at management-level but the fact that the authority, in its internal communication, uses the customer notion in reference to stakeholders of all kinds, from debtors to creditors or other persons that encounter the authority, cannot be overlooked by anyone working at the SEA (field notes). This feature of the organization's customer orientation is not least noticed when reading articles on the organization's intranet, where the clients are continuously referred to as “customers”. However, the customer notion is applied in most of the authority's internal communication, and it is only in a few of the reviewed strategy directions (in strategy directions with topics such as “suicide threats” (SEA 2014e) and “how to relate to children” (SEA 2014c)) that the notion is not being used at all in reference to the organization's stakeholders.

The use of the customer notion is by the SEA depicted as a strategic choice and said to mark the organization's “customer oriented approach” (SEA 2009). It is also rationalized as a tool that aids the authority and the employees to consider “the situation that our customers are in”, in other words it is supposed to aid the employees to see the activities that the organization is involved in from an “outside-and-in perspective” (e.g., SEA 2013b; 2019b), or from the “customers' perspective” (e.g., SEA 2009; 2014a). The use of the notion is at times also portrayed to create a certain culture, a “customer culture”:

...by approaching [the clients] as customers we build a *customer culture* within the authority, and this makes us a customer-driven organization [my emphasis]. (SEA 2013b)³⁷

As seen in the quote above, the SEA considers it implied in the customer orientation of the organization to treat, as well as refer to, the organization's

³⁷ ...genom att förhålla oss till [klienterna] som kunder bygger vi en kundkultur inom myndigheten och det gör oss till en kunddriven organisation.

clients as “customers”. It is, indeed, a few times in the strategic directions, acknowledged that some of the employees might be reluctant towards the idea of referring to the organization’s clients as “customers” (particularly in reference to the debtors) but it is also often proclaimed that this is how the employees now ought to talk: “...as we intend to strengthen a customer oriented **approach**, where we start much more clearly from those we exist for, we shall continue to talk about our ‘customers’”³⁸ (SEA 2013b bolding in original).

As seen in earlier chapters, the re-characterization of the public sector users into “customers” (rather than to view them merely as “citizens” or other more conventional notions such as “clients” etc.) is often up for debate, not only internally at the SEA, but also in academia as well as in the public and political debate. This debate starts from the impression that the notion of customers is inappropriate to use in a public setting as the relationship between the clients and the public organizations is not comparable to the relationship between the customers and business organizations on the market. The notion of “customers” is often said to have a connotation of activity and sovereignty (see Section 3.3.1.1). This debate about the customer notion’s applicability in public management motivates a closer examination of how the SEA applies the notion of “customers”, especially as the environment of the SEA differs significantly from business environments, and even from a public point-of-view is somewhat extreme. The SEA may not, like most market organizations, focus on a certain brand of customers but must instead deal with all the individuals requiring the organization’s services, and many of the organization’s customers are reluctant or “unwilling customers”, meaning that they would opt out of the relationship with the organization if possible. So, how does the SEA apply the notion, how does the organization describe its “customers” and their characteristics in this extraordinary setting?

5.2.1.1 The heterogeneous customers of the SEA

The SEA is frequently underscoring the “heterogeneity” of its customers. To be able to manage these heterogeneous customers they are sometimes segmented into three categories or, as stated by the organization, three “customer groups”: “debtors”, “creditors” and “the public” (e.g., SEA 2009; 2013b; 2013c; 2013e; 2014a). Occasionally, the organization even states that its customers are so disparate that each and one of them ought to be dealt with based on his/her unique and exceptional condition (e.g., SEA 2013b; 2014a).

³⁸ “...eftersom vi har för avsikt att stärka ett kundorienterat **förhållningssätt**, där vi mycket tydligare utgår från dem vi finns till för, ska vi även fortsatt prata om våra ’kunder’”

By segmenting the customers into “customer-groups” the organization thus opens up for a different treatment of its customers depending on which group the customer(s) belongs to. The SEA emphasizes that there are some characteristics and needs that are the same for all customers, however; there also are several characteristics and needs that are unique for the different customer-groups. For instance, customers of the customer-group “creditors” are described as having access to a large amount of information and knowledge, having a high capability to safeguard their interests, and they are described as more active than the other customers. Customers of the customer-group “debtors” are, on the contrary, described as having a low amount of knowledge, lacking the capability to safeguard their interest, they are passive and in a great need of guidance and personal contact. The customers of the group “the public” are described based on their requirements on the authority to be accessible and informative, for instance by having a modern homepage (e.g., SEA 2009; 2013b; 2013c).

Table 5.1 The “customer-groups” of the SEA and their characteristics

Debtors	Creditors	The public
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passive • Have access to a low amount of knowledge and information • Low capability to safeguard their interests • Need a lot of help, guidance and personal contact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active • Have access to a high amount of knowledge and information • High capability to safeguard their interests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need an accessible and informative authority

When the SEA is not segmenting its customers, but instead describing them as a collective, the “customers” are described with characteristics quite far from “sovereign” and “active”. Instead, they are described as passive and unequipped, for instance it is often argued that the organization must activate and guide its customers into certain behaviours, and it is also frequently proclaimed that the customers wish to “do the right thing”, however, they lack the needed abilities (e.g., SEA 2018d). Another often repeated description of the customers is the description of them as potential threatening. For instance, in case a customer is invited into a meeting room (outside of the “safe” reception area) the employees are urged to take safety measures (SEA 2015c). In the instruction for how the “standard office” should be designed, the potential threat of the customers is significant as the reception areas should be designed to prevent attacks (2015e):

A fundamental principle is that it must be a physical demarcation (for instance the reception desk) between customers/visitors and employees. The distance that is then created is supposed to prevent/obstruct a potential attack on employees and give them time and space for retreat (SEA 2015e)³⁹

5.2.2 To be responsive to the customers and their needs

The re-characterization of the clients into customers is, however, not the only feature of the customer orientation of the SEA. Another feature is the aim to listen to the customers, to consider their needs, and in different ways be responsive towards those needs. This is a feature of the customer orientation of the SEA that may be detected in both strategy directions as well as on the intranet. In several strategy directions, the organization describes how it is in a process of transformation. From having been internally oriented to instead becoming “customer oriented”, and that this transformation, among other things, implies that the organization, instead of treating all customers the same way, must start to adapt its treatment based on its customers’ heterogeneity and their diverse needs (e.g., SEA 2013b; 2013g; 2018d). The organization thus aims to meet the customers on the customers’ terms, and to choose actions depending on situation and “target group” (SEA 2015a), and to always “consider the situation that the customers are in” (SEA 2009). It is also frequently proclaimed that the customers’ needs must direct how the organization operates, how it is organized and how the employees act:

The customers’ needs are our starting point. We always ask ourselves - In what way is this better for the customer? (SEA 2013e)⁴⁰

The SEA wants to offer new and current customer-groups a target-group adapted communication and be responsive to how we meet the customers’ needs for dialogue (SEA 2015a)⁴¹

³⁹ En grundprincip är att det ska finnas en fysisk avgränsning (t.ex. receptionsdisklinje) mellan kunder/besökare och medarbetare. Det avstånd som skapas härigenom ska förhindra/försvåra ett eventuellt angrepp på medarbetare samt ge dem tid och utrymme till reträtt.

⁴⁰ Kundernas behov är vår utgångspunkt. Vi ställer oss alltid frågan – På vilket sätt blir detta bättre för kunden?

⁴¹ Kronofogden vill erbjuda nya och befintliga kundgrupper en målgruppsanpassad kommunikation samt vara lyhörd för hur vi möter kundernas behov av dialog.

One aspect that the SEA claims to work substantially with, in order to better respond to the needs of its heterogeneous customers, is the ways in which the customers may communicate with the organization (SEA 2013c; SEA 2013d). The organization repeatedly declares that it strives to be easily accessible, and that it attempts to offer several diverse communication channels (e.g., SEA 2013f). The organization also frequently underlines that it must meet the “customers’ *latest* needs” (my emphasizing) and that the customers nowadays require an opportunity to have a dialogue with the organization. The requirements of having a platform for dialogue are met by, for instance, having a Facebook-page (SEA 2015a; 2016a; 2017a; 2018c). The development of digital services is often justified as a way to customize the authority’s services, it is thus a development that, according to the organization, will benefit its heterogeneous customers.

The SEA also frequently underscores that it must be better at collecting information from the customers so that it better may respond to their needs (e.g., SEA 2018c). Moreover, occasionally the SEA states that customer surveys are something that the organization must increase its work with to truly become customer responsive (SEA 2013f; 2017b). Nonetheless, knowledge about the customers is not only described as being generated by surveys, but also in the meetings the employees have with the customers:

We are working systematically to collect knowledge and experiences from all of our customer meetings, regardless of whether they happen physically, by telephone or through other channels, and we analyse these continuously (SEA 2013b)⁴²

To be customer oriented is occasionally also said to imply that the organization must strive “to develop services based on the customer’s *true* needs” (SEA 2014a, my emphasizing). The organization thus highlights that it is of great importance to understand that what the customers ask for is not necessarily their true needs: “...we must understand the customer’s needs, which might not be the same as what the customer requires” (Ibid.). The organization proclaims that it is important to ask: “In what way is this better for the customer?”, and to always start from the customers’ true needs is considered an important guiding rule (SEA 2014a). Occasionally, it is also described that

⁴² Vi har ett systematiskt arbetssätt för att samla in kunskap och erfarenheter från alla våra kundmöten oavsett om de sket fysiskt, via telefon eller annan kanal och vi analyserar dessa fortlöpande.

being responsive to the customers and their needs means that the customers must be given a chance to “do the right thing”, and only if the customer fails to solve a problem by himself/herself, the authority may take further actions (such as for instance coercive measures) (SEA 2016c; 2018c).

Furthermore, that it is considered important to be responsive to the customers and their needs is also, as mentioned, often declared in articles published on the organization’s intranet. Something that, for instance, may be exemplified by an article presenting the results of an analysis of the “The customer’s journey” (Swe. “Kundresan”). An analysis that was aiming for a deeper understanding of why the “customer group of over-indebted” does not apply for debt-reliefs to the extent that the SEA wishes. In this article, it is explained that the SEA is failing to transfer this “customer group” from the enforcement process to the debt-relief process, and the reason for this failure is said to be that the employees currently are not seeing the activities from the “customers’ perspective”. One of the analysts comments that the SEA “...loves to inform by sending letters but the recipients throw them away without opening them”⁴³ (Intr. 06/03/2018) and he establishes that the SEA now “...must substantially work with our movement away from today’s inside-and-out perspective...”⁴⁴ (Ibid).

Moreover, that the SEA, and its employees, ought to be responsive to the customers is also implied in an interview with a top manager published on the intranet. In this article, the manager is quoted saying that it is crucial to “increase the focus on the customers’ perspective”, while also adding that the organization and its employees always must strive towards providing the customers with service “based on the customers’ true needs” (Intr.23/08/2011). When a new way of assessing the employees’ work results is presented in an article on the intranet, this so-called “performance development” is also described as a way to increase the employees’ incentive to be responsive to the customers (Intr.30/08/2011). Another example, from the intranet, when it is expressed as an aim for the organization to be responsive to the customers is when it is announced that an “idea bank” will be constructed so that the employees may contribute with good ideas on how the authority might improve. It is then stated that all comments that are sent to the idea bank ought to “benefit the customers”. It is also explicitly proclaimed that acting customer oriented is something that ought to guide the employees’ attitude, which includes being “responsive to the customer’s requirements”:

⁴³ ... älskar att informera genom brev men mottagarna slänger våra brev utan att öppna dom.

⁴⁴ ...måste väsentligt arbeta med vår förflyttning bort från dagens inifrån-och-ut perspektiv....

To work customer oriented and to really accomplish improvements for the customer requires that everybody at the SEA must help. We must all have that mindset and work on being responsive to the customers' requirements (Intr. 30/03/2012)⁴⁵

That it is considered important to be responsive to the customers is also implied in several interviews published on the intranet with the two director general's that have been leading the SEA during the period included in the study. In one article, the former director is quoted saying that the organization must be organized in a way that will facilitate for the employees to "...meet our customers' needs and expectations" (Intr. 24/05/2010). In another article she proclaims that the organization must start to consider the customers' needs to a much bigger extent:

There is only one way, and that is the way that leads us closer to our customers. We must create as good conditions as possible for our core activities, so that we might be able to meet our customers' requirements, and this also includes how we control, manage and organize the authority. Today, our organization is based, to a large extent, on our own, internal perspective and not enough from the ones that we are here for (Intr. 22/09/2010)⁴⁶

Later her successor, the then newly appointed general director, comments the authority's service level, and she is clearly signalling that she also considers it important to be responsive to the customers, as she is painting a rather dark picture of the organization's service-level with customers that are forced to wait, activities based on "emergency calls" (compared to a fire-department) and an "inside-and-out" perspective. To be able to turn the perspective, to an "outside-and-in perspective", she believes that acting customer responsive must be the organization's main principle (Intr. 18/04/2016). She says that there is an "expectation gap" between "what the customers expect" and what the authority is "able to deliver". A gap she says might be bridged by an increased focus on the customers' needs and on "service" (Intr. 22/04/2016). In another

⁴⁵ För att arbeta kundorienterat och verkligen åstadkomma förbättringar för kunden måste alla på Kronofogden hjälpas åt. Vi måste alla ha den attityden och arbeta med att vara lyhörda för kundernas krav.

⁴⁶ Det finns bara en väg, och det är den väg som leder oss närmare våra kunder. Vi måste skapa så goda förutsättningar som möjligt för vår kärnverksamhet att kunna möta våra kunders krav, och det omfattar också hur vi styr, leder och organiserar oss. Vår organisation idag utgår i hög grad från våra egna, interna perspektiv och alltför lite, från dem vi finns till för.

interview, she is also referring to this, as she calls it, “expectation gap”: “We must act to change this” she states and adds that the authority is “far behind” when it comes to the customers’ expectations on digitalizing and level of service. Furthermore, she declares that the formation of a new “production department” (a department in which the “enforcement process” is included) will help the authority to see its processes from the “customers’ perspective” (Intr. 20/06/2016).

When organizational changes or improvements are being presented on the intranet these changes are quite often also motivated with the argument that they will aid the SEA to be better at being customer responsive. For instance, when a new workgroup that will start to work with innovations (“the function of innovation”) is presented on the intranet, the work of the group is said to be aiming for innovations that will “benefit the customers” (Intr.28/02/2017), and when a new “development department” is launched, this new department is said to be an important step towards making the SEA more modern, more “responsive to the customers” and more “customer oriented” (Intr.23/05/2017). In an article on the intranet reporting about the introduction of a “Lean-model”, this model is described as a way to help the employees to have “...the customers’ needs in focus” (Intr.31/01/2012). When the SEA later adopts another new work process called “constant improvements” is this also motivated by how it may facilitate having “the customers in focus”. The new work process is explained as a method for being responsive to the customers’ needs by taking advantage of the employees’ knowledge of what the customers’ need (Intr.05/07/2016). The organization’s initiative to start having an “agile working method” and “agile development” is also motivated by the method’s ability to put the customers’ needs in focus (Intr. 02/07/2019).

5.2.3 To create value

In the SEA’s strategy directions, it is often stated that a meeting with a customer should be considered as a chance to create an “...added value in the form of positive experiences of the SEA”⁴⁷ (SEA 2009). A strive to create value, or even an “added value”, for the customers may consequently also be considered a feature of the SEA’s customer orientation. It is in the directions often proclaimed that it is important to increase the value for the customers:

⁴⁷ ...mervärde i form av positiva erfarenheter av Kronofogden.

In our meeting with the customer, we shall give the customer an added value (SEA 2013h)⁴⁸

Even when a person is in a tough situation [...], we must strive to create an added value for the customer in the meeting by treating him or her with respect and professionalism. We need to focus more on the customer's experience and the value of the meeting (SEA 2009)⁴⁹

One way to create value for the customers is, according to the SEA, to have employees that are always being properly prepared for their job tasks: "By being prepared and being informed of the matter of which the customer has questions, we create customer value"⁵⁰ (SEA 2012a). Moreover, value creation seems to be a matter of shattering the customers prejudice about how one is being treated by the organization, at least this is implied when the organization proclaims: "We treat our customers in a way that outperforms their expectations"⁵¹ (SEA 2013b).

This feature of the customer orientation of the SEA may also be spotted in some articles published on the intranet, for instance when an article is published in connection with the implementation of Lean. A consultant (engaged by the SEA to implement Lean) then explains that the Lean-model may help the organization and the employees to create value for the customers, as she states that: "[Lean] is a management-philosophy and builds on respect for the human. It means that we shall only work with that which brings value to the human, the customer"⁵² (Intr. 31/03/2014).

5.2.4 To adjust the customers

It is, in the internal communication of the SEA, also sometimes proclaimed that the organization, in various ways, must adjust the customers and their behaviours. Thus, rather than just being responsive to the customers and their

⁴⁸ I vårt möte med kunden ska vi ge kunden ett mervärde

⁴⁹ Även i en för individen svår situation [...] ska vi sträva efter att skapa ett mervärde för kunden i mötet, genom att han eller hon blir bemött med respekt och professionalism, vi måste mer tydligt fokusera på kundens upplevelse och värde av mötet.

⁵⁰ I och med att vi är förberedda och insatta i ärendet som kunden har frågor om, skapar vi kundnytta.

⁵¹ Vi bemöter våra kunder på ett sätt som överträffar deras förväntningar.

⁵² Det är en ledningsfilosofi och bygger på respekt för människan. Det innebär att vi bara ska arbeta med det som tillför värde för människan, kunden.

needs (as described above) the authority often also proclaims that it must change its customers. This is for instance demonstrated when the organization is trying to decrease the number of visits to its offices. Instead, the customers are encouraged to use self-services (email or webpage) or to contact the organization via customer service (SEA 2012a) and the employees are urged to change the behaviour of the customers by explaining to the customers the advantages with these new ways of interacting with the organization.

The SEA is, as seen above, often claiming that its customers are passive and unequipped, and this is also a reason why the authority must be aiming to adjust the customers and to be supportive in order for the customers to “help themselves” instead of just being dependent of the help of the SEA. “Strengthening” and “activating” are words often repeated when explaining how the organization should approach its customers. Having this approach is described as vital if the customers are going to be able to “...make choices that improve or solve their situation” (SEA 2013d). To “activate the customers” is, at times, described as being just as natural as taking enforcement measures:

Within the enforcement procedure we shall put as much power on activating as on enforcing (SEA 2013a).⁵³

We are communicating for the benefit of the customer so that the communication, by preventing or strengthening and activating, always creates an opportunity for the customer to manage their situation (SEA 2013d)⁵⁴

To adjust the customers might be said to be a feature of the organization’s customer orientation that somehow has been subdued during recent years as the activating part of the enforcement procedure has been decreased, something that also the enforcement officers often reflect on and interpret as an increased focus on a fast and efficient work process instead of a focus on customer orientation (field notes).

⁵³ Inom verkställighet ska vi satsa like mycket kraft på att aktivera som att verkställa.

⁵⁴ Vi kommunicerar till nytta för kunden så att kommunikationen genom att förebygga eller stärka och aktivera, alltid skapar möjlighet för kunden att hantera sin situation.

5.3 The principles coexisting with customer orientation

As presented above, customer orientation is promoted by the SEA as an important guiding rule, and the customer orientation of the organization is thus presenting several demands to the organization and its employees on how to act and behave. However, as a public organization, it might be assumed that the SEA also must take other demands into consideration regarding how it should be organized and how the employees should act, presumably demands more traditionally associated with public activities and public settings. One way to explore what demands that the SEA must manage, besides the ones presented by customer orientation, could be to examine what legally determined requirements that are placed on the organization. However, one would then risk missing demands that are not legally determined but that, nevertheless, might be permeating the organization. To be sure to capture all demands that the organization must manage, I have instead, as explained in the previous chapter, explored the SEA's internal communication, and searched for demands and categorized these demands as different principles. Principles in the meaning of guiding rules or instructions for how to act and behave, principles that might be stemming from both formally determined rules as well as from conceptual ideas permeating the organization. In the following sections, I will present these principles and describe how they are expressed, and what demands they are presenting to the organization and its employees.

5.3.1 A principle of legality

A principle prominent at the SEA, and that also is supported by Swedish law⁵⁵, is a principle that I here call a principle of legality. This principle's basic foundation is the supremacy of the law. It is stating that the law must be considered in all situations and aspects, and that all decisions must be enforced in a way that ensures legal security and legal accuracy. It is a principle that somehow may be summarized in the statement: "[E]verything we do is guided by law" (SEA2013e). This is a principle that, just as with customer orientation, permeates all aspects of the organization. A strive for legal accuracy also

⁵⁵ See for instance the Swedish Instrument of government, Regeringsformen (SFS 1974: 152) 1 kap. 2 §, stating that all public power must be exercised under the laws, and the Swedish Administrative Procedure Act, Förvaltningslagen (SFS 2017:900) 5 §, stating that Swedish authorities only may take measures that are supported by the legal order.

directs many details of the daily work at the organization, such as how to handle information and how to act when working from home (field notes). This principle of legality is, although frequently displayed and detectable in much of the SEA's written communication, especially emphasized in strategy directions focused on topics with a clear practical focus, i.e., documents directing the organization and its employees on how to act legally correct in practical situations.

It is, in the strategy directions, often emphasized that the public must be able to be absolutely certain that the authority works in a legally accurate way (SEA 2012b; 2015d). When going through the strategy directions one also finds that this principle of legality, with its strict legal focus, sometimes seems to have a restricting effect on how far the authority might go in its strive to improve its service level. This is revealed by how frequently it is underscored that service and support, first and foremost, always must be provided "in a legally secure way" (e.g., SEA 2018c). Another example is that the SEA is concerned that a service attitude perhaps might be taken too far by some of the workforce and that legal limitations means that the employees must know "...where to draw the line when it comes to giving advice and support"⁵⁶ (SEA 2013f). This principle of legality might also restrict how far the organization might go in its digital communication, and when it is stated that the organization's strive is to improve its e-services, it is also added that the communication might be digital "...to the extent that the legislation permits it"⁵⁷ (2018c).

This principle of legality is also evident in many articles published on the intranet. For instance, when it is reported from the work to construct a new organizational vision, and it is proclaimed that the vision must be signalling that the organization always must "...work in a legally secure way" so that it may "uphold the will to pay and thereby ensure a functioning credit society"⁵⁸ (Intr.30/05/2011). Another example is taken from an interview with the general director in which she underlines the SEA's important legal mission, and she prompts the employees to always act legally correct: "We have an important mission and we contribute to the financing of the public sector. We can make a difference for people by acting wise and legally secure during our daily work"⁵⁹ (Intr. 24/11/2016).

⁵⁶ ... var dra gränsen för att ge stöd och råd.

⁵⁷ ...i den mån lagstiftningen tillåter.

⁵⁸ upprätthålla betalningsviljan och därigenom säkerställa ett fungerande kreditsamhälle.

⁵⁹ Vi har ett viktigt uppdrag och bidrar till finansieringen av den offentliga sektorn. Vi kan göra skillnad för människor genom att agera klokt och rättssäkert i vårt dagliga arbete.

In the internal communication of the SEA, the organization is also often presenting itself as an important factor in the government's effort to counteract criminality, especially organized criminality. This "self-presentation" may be considered as an element of a principle of legality, as it is depicting the organization as a "law enforcer". This self-presentation is primarily detectable in articles on the intranet reporting about successful collaborations with other authorities (e.g., Intr. 12/05/2011; Intr. 05/04/2017), and in colourful stories reporting about the SEA's work together with other authorities to seize crime-related profits. For instance, when it is reported about how the SEA has searched the premises of a motorcycle club (Intr.18/03/2010) or when it is reported from an operation that took place simultaneous at a number of airports (Intr. 04/05/2017). Another article on the same theme is about another operation performed by the SEA's special enforcement unit, an operation that was performed on restaurants and pubs in the city of Stockholm. The special enforcement unit is portrayed as being a very important part of the organization as it helps the organization to fulfil one of its "central missions": To counteract criminality (Intr. 26/09/2016). The special enforcement unit is also in the spotlight when an intranet article is reporting about the unit's 24 hours open telephone line, which is a telephone line that other authorities may call when they find assets and they suspect that the owner has unpaid debts registered with the SEA. The calls are often from the police and the unit's manager declares that he is proud of the results that have been achieved due to the telephone line:

The societal benefit is actually greater than what can be measured in crowns and pennies. The criminals are having a harder time and they know that we exist. Our collaboration with, primarily, the police [...] must be considered a success. (Intr. 03/02/2017)⁶⁰

5.3.2 A principle of objectivity

Another principle detectable in the SEA's internal communication that also is supported by law⁶¹, is a principle declaring the importance of the employees

⁶⁰ Samhällsnyttan är ju faktiskt större än man kan mäta i kronor och öre. De kriminella får det svårare och de vet att vi finns. Vår samverkan med i första hand polisen [...] måste ses som en framgång.

⁶¹ See the Swedish Instrument of government, Regeringsformen (SFS 1974: 152) 1 kap. 9 §, stating that Swedish authorities shall in their activities consider everyone's equality before the law and observe objectivity and impartiality. This principle is also supported by several

always acting objective, impartial, and without arbitrariness. Impartiality is, for instance, emphasized as an uncompromised rule when the organization describes its policy on how to act within the enforcement procedure: "We never challenge our impartiality and we perform our mission in the way that the legislator and our principal wishes"⁶² (SEA 2013f). A focus on an objective treatment is also permeating the SEA's "code of conduct" (SEA 2014d). Moreover, that the employees manage to stay objective is even said to be vital for the organization to be successful in preserving the public's trust in public administration:

The trust in public administration is depending on that citizens, enterprises and organizations have a trust in them being treated factually and legally secure and that we are not affected by irrelevant wishes or considerations (SEA 2014b)⁶³

Demands of objectivity may also sometimes be noticed in articles that are published on the intranet, as when it is reported about an upcoming project to review the organization's "meetings with the customers". In this article, it is described that an equal and impartial treatment is highly prioritized, and to act and treat everybody equally, no matter of where or how or who, is also explained as a fundamental principle within public service (Intr. 30/03/2010).

5.3.3 A principle of strict procedures

A principle that also may be said to pervade the SEA is a principle that highlights the importance of having correct and well-defined instructions for internal procedures and the importance to always follow these instructions to the letter. This is a principle that may be said to be closely related to the principle of legality, and, in a similar way, the principle of strict procedures sometimes might be experienced to pervade every detail of the work activities at the organizations with strict rules for how to perform every aspect of the work (field notes).

other laws and constitutions (for instance in the Swedish Administrative Procedure Act, Förvaltningslagen (SFS2017:900).

⁶² Vi tummar dock aldrig på vår opartiskhet och utför vårt myndighetsuppdrag på det sätt lagstiftaren och uppdragsgivaren tänkt sig.

⁶³ Förtroendet för den offentliga förvaltningen är helt beroende av att medborgare, företag och organisationer kan lita på att de blir sakligt och rättssäkert bemötta och att vi som verkar där inte låter oss påverkas av ovidkommande önskemål eller hänsyn.

Within the written communication this is a principle that primarily is observable in the strategy directions and often spotted in connection with topics close to practice. For instance, when the organization adopts a new safety plan, that is a plan where it, several times, is underscored that the authority and its employees must always act correctly and in accordance with the rules of procedures (SEA 2012b). Another example when this principle can be detected is when the authority's launched its Facebook-page. The launching of the Facebook-page was, on the one hand, motivated with arguments that could be linked to customer orientation, emphasizing that the webpage facilitates for the authority to meet the customers' needs of being a modern authority that is offering "target adapted communication" and so forth. On the other hand, it is also underlined that, although this is a new and modern communication tool, it is extremely important that posts and content of the page must be handled in accordance with administrative rules and procedures (SEA 2015a). Often the SEA's strategy directions also include descriptions of what it means to perform certain procedures in a correct way. For instance, when proclaiming that the hierarchical order must be followed when a message is passed on within the organization:

The communication should as a main principle follow the line, which means that the immediate executive communicates with her/his employees and subordinated executives. The subordinated executive communicates in their turn with their employees and so on and so forth (SEA 2015b)⁶⁴

Many strategy directions also have practical rules for how the employees should behave in certain practical situations, for instance when performing fieldwork: "A mutual signal for retreat that indicates when to call off the activity must be agreed on beforehand"⁶⁵ (SEA 2015e). Furthermore, in the organization's policy for "unauthorized impact" the employees are urged to always act according to laws as well as in accordance with the internal rules of procedures (SEA 2015d). Sometimes this principle is revealed by how the employees are said to be obliged to be updated about the internal rules of procedure:

⁶⁴ Kommunikationen ska som huvudprincip följa linjen, det vill säga närmaste chef kommunicerar med sina medarbetare och underordnade chefer. Underordnade chefer kommunicerar i sin tur med sina medarbetare osv.

⁶⁵ En gemensam reträttsignal som indikerar när förrättningen ska avbrytas ska vara överenskommen i förväg.

As an employee you have the responsibility to know and follow internal regulatory documents and observe and report safety issues to the closest manager, safety function, or IT-department (SEA 2018d).⁶⁶

5.3.4 A principle of efficiency

Yet another principle that may be traced in the internal communication of the SEA, and that also may be linked to legally determined requirements⁶⁷, is a principle I call a principle of efficiency. This is a principle that is grounded in different cost-saving or efficiency pursuing activities or requirements. It is a principle which is detectable primarily in written communication and the primarily in strategy directions with an overall strategic orientation; documents in which the organization underscores the requirements on the organization and its employees to save costs and reduce waste and to use resources more efficient (e.g., SEA 2016b; 2018d; 2019c). This principle is also noticeable by how a streamlining of the organization is encouraged with the often-repeated organizational saying: “to do more with less” (SEA 2016b; 2019c). The employees are also often required to decrease expenses (SEA 2012a; 2013f) and to make choices based on cost-efficiency: “We have a culture of cost awareness; everyone feels a responsibility to save state resources”⁶⁸ (SEA 2013e). The strive for efficiency is also displayed in documents regulating the opening hours for the organization’s reception desks, as new reduced opening hours are said to create “... [the] best possible effects to, for the authority, lowest possible cost” (SEA 2012a). This principle is also revealed by how the authority invests in digitalization, something that ought to mean that the employees in the future will be getting fewer (SEA2019c).

A principle of efficiency may also be considered to permeate the emphasis on quantifiable measures on the operational level of the organization. Within the enforcement procedure there has, during recent years, been an increase focus on the number of initiated investigations, a quantifiable target against which the work of the enforcement officers is assessed. This is a target

⁶⁶ Du har som medarbetare ett ansvar för att känna till och följa interna styrande dokument, samt att vara uppmärksamma på och rapportera säkerhetsbrister till närmaste chef, säkerhetsfunktion eller IT-avdelning.

⁶⁷ In the Swedish Budget Act, Budgetlagen (SFS 2011:203) 3§, it is stated that: “In the state’s operations, a high efficiency shall be sought and a good housekeeping shall be observed”

⁶⁸ Vår kultur är kostnadsmedveten, där alla känner ett ansvar för att hushålla med statens resurser.

encouraging the officers to work efficiently; to achieve higher targets even with small resources (fieldnotes).

5.3.5 Brand orientation

Another principle detectable at the SEA is a principle that guides the organization and its employees into considering, and reflecting on, the way that the organization is viewed and perceived. It is a principle closely related to the organization's strive to be customer oriented, as it often is proclaimed that the organization must change its brand into being seen as a customer oriented organization. Just as with customer orientation, brand orientation is a principle that often is present when top managers declare their vision of the organization and how the organization ought to develop over time (field notes).

In the written communication, this principle is revealed by how it is frequently stated in the organization's strategy directions that the public's confidence in the SEA must be improved, as well as by how it frequently is proclaimed that the organization must "strengthen the brand" (e.g., SEA 2013g; 2016c). Moreover, this principle is revealed by an often explicitly expressed wish to, not only strengthen the brand, but to change the brand of the organization (SEA 2013c; 2013e; 2016c). Also, it is at times proclaimed that the brand of the organization currently is full of associations such as "authoritarian", "tough" and "harsh", and that the brand must change so that it instead may be associated with qualities such as "guiding", "impelling", "responsive" and "empathic" (SEA 2013g; 2016c). The wished state ("the softer values we wish to communicate") is justified by how a new brand would facilitate for the organization in its contact with the outside world:

The authority is mostly associated with debts and debt-collection, and few know about our proactive and supporting role. This leads to the public often having preconceptions and sometimes a negative and not entirely fair, image of the SEA. This attitude makes it harder for us to carry out our work (SEA 2016c)⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Myndigheten förknippas främst med skulder och indrivning, och få känner till vår förebyggande och stödjande roll. Det leder till att allmänheten ofta har förutfattade meningar och ibland en negativ och inte helt rättvisande bild av Kronofogden. Inställningen gör det också svårare för oss att genomföra vårt arbete.

The wished state means that the outside world's fear for the SEA decreases, so that one dares to contact us in time for advice and support (SEA 2016c)⁷⁰

One may perhaps think that brand orientation would be an abstract principle far from the frontline activities. But on the contrary, it is in the strategy directions, quite often emphasized that to succeed with the change of brand, the brand must be considered even when taking enforcement measures:

Before every measure we take, even those that might seem spectacular or challenging, we make conscious choices concerning how these measures might affect our brand. When we have a chance to choose, which we almost always have, we must prioritize (SEA 2013a)⁷¹

Our behaviour, even when we are taking enforcement measures, shall as far as possible strengthen our brand and increase the customers' confidence in us (SEA 2013a)⁷²

This principle also infers that the organization has to change internally, as it often is proclaimed that in case the external brand is to be changed, then the internal culture must first be modified. For instance, it is stated that the aim must be to change the organizational culture "from public official to customer focus"⁷³ (SEA 2013c). This change of culture is explained to take time; however, it is a change that, according to the SEA, must be allowed to take time, as the old culture was a culture that is described as "opposing changes", a culture that is called "the culture of the law enforcing authority" (SEA 2013b). A culture that might stand as an obstacle in the change of the external brand. It is also described as a weakness that the "customer culture" has not been fully implemented yet and that the customer culture in the future must permeate the whole organization and all its employees. This is a principle that also declares that the employees should start viewing themselves as "service providers": "We have a mental picture of ourselves as service providers rather

⁷⁰ Det önskade läget innebär att omvärldens rädsla för Kronofogden minskar, så att man vågar kontakta oss i tid för råd och stöd.

⁷¹ Inför alla steg vi tar, även de som betraktas som spektakulära eller utmanande, gör vi medvetna val med avseende på hur åtgärderna påverkar vårt varumärke. När vi har möjlighet att välja, vilket vi i princip alltid har, ska vi prioritera de åtgärder som stärker varumärket.

⁷² Vårt agerande, även när vi verkställer, ska så långt som möjligt stärka vårt varumärke och öka kundernas förtroende för oss

⁷³ Förändrad företagskultur från statstjänsteman till kundfokusering

than authority exercisers”⁷⁴(SEA 2013e). In the future, the organization’s goal is that its employees see the activities they perform primarily as “services”:

This activity is now considered a service provider that to a large extent is working with support and information to create an added value for the customer (SEA 2013e)⁷⁵

This principle is also detectable in several articles that are published on the intranet. For instance, when the organization in an article presents a new graphical profile, including a slightly changed logotype. The change of graphical profile and logotype is, in the article, justified with arguments such as that it is a way to change the image of the organization, as the organization in the past has been associated with “bureaucracy and authority”. The communication director describes the change as a “logo evolution” (Intr. 16/11/2011). The logotype that was presented, which at the time of writing is the current logotype, is quite similar to the previous one but with a slightly changed form and new colours; green instead of blue and yellow. Furthermore, when the “new organization” was presented on the intranet in its final form, the new logo was presented along with a new organizational slogan: “A driving force for everybody to pay and nobody to become over-indebted”⁷⁶ (Intr. 12/12/2011). The slogan was said to demonstrate how the organization should change. The first part (“a driving force for everybody to pay”) is explained as demonstrating that the authority now will start to enter early in the “customers’ processes” and activate them so that the customers may come up with solutions to their own situations (the authority is thus acting “pro-active”). The second part (“nobody to become over-indebted”) is said to indicate that the authority will increase the confidence among its customers “so that one dares to contact us in time” (Intr. 12/12/2011). In a later article, the communication director comments the change of logotype by saying that the new colours were chosen to have a calming effect (Intr. 22/03/2012).

When the authority launches a new design of its (external) webpage this is, on the intranet, also explained as a way to “capture the change the organization is going through”. In other words, the new design is motivated with arguments of a need to change the organization’s brand (Intr. 22/03/2012). Customer surveys are a way to capture the citizens’ impression of the organization, and

⁷⁴ Vi har en mental bild av oss själva som servicegivare snarare än myndighetsutövare

⁷⁵ Verksamheten har blivit en uttalad servicegivare som till en stor del arbetar med stöd och information för att skapa ett mervärde för kunden

⁷⁶ En pådrivande kraft för att alla betalar och ingen blir överskuld satt.

sometimes it is reported on the intranet about the results of recent surveys, for instance, in an article reporting about a survey that also has included the employees. It is explained that the survey has been aiming to "...capturing the image of the public's confidence in the SEA and how we have succeeded in developing our brand towards a more empathic, guiding and solution oriented authority"⁷⁷ (Intr. 07/12/2012). It is also described that the reason that the survey is also targeting the employees is that "what we do internally is mirrored to externally" and that therefore, the organization needs to better understand "the internal perception of the brand".

When the organization starts to sell seized property from its homepage this is also justified with arguments in accordance with branding ideas, as this way of selling property is said to lead to "...a stronger brand" (Intr. 12/03/2015). This principle of brand orientation may also be said to make way for the organization to seek inspiration from other organizations, even from for-profit market organizations. On the intranet it is reported that the SEA's development director has been meeting with a car component-manufacturer to learn and be inspired from their working methods (Intr. 18/01/2019).

5.4 Discussion

This chapter began with an introduction of the case organization, the Swedish Enforcement Authority, a public organization that could be labelled as a coercive public organization, as its assignment sometimes requires the organization to take coercive measures towards its clients. I then presented what customer orientation implies for the SEA, and I found that there are four features that frequently are repeated when the organization describes customer orientation and how to relate to its clients. These four main features are: 1) that the clients should be treated as "customers", not only on an strategic level but also by actually referring to them as "customers", 2) that the organization and its employees should be responsive to the customers and their needs, 3) that the organization and the employees should aim to create "value" or even "added-value" when meeting its customers, and lastly 4) that the organization at times also must adjust and direct the customers so that they act in a way that suites the organization (and, according to the organization, a way that also is the best for the customers, at least in the long run).

⁷⁷ ...fånga in bilden av allmänhetens förtroende för Kronofogden och hur vi lyckats utveckla vårt varumärke mot en mer empatisk, vägledande och lösningorienterad myndighet.

Accordingly, the first, and probably most visible, feature of the organization's customer orientation is the often-repeated proclamation that the authority's clients should be treated as well as referred to as "customers". The re-characterization of the public service users into business-associated terms often follows the adoption of market-inspired elements. And with the adoption of customer orientation often comes the notion of "customers". The use of the customer notion within public management is, as also seen in earlier chapters, often debated, not least among scholars.

When I examined how the SEA depicts its "customers" and their characteristics I found that the SEA accentuates that its customers are heterogeneous, and that they have very dissimilar needs. As a response the organization segments its customer into so-called "customer groups", customer groups that are "debtors", "creditors" and "the public". This segmentation process enables a more adapted treatment depending on which group the customer belongs to. This could perhaps calm the critics claiming that customer orientation in public management is a concept that oversimplifies a complex reality (e.g., Hirschmann 1999), as the SEA obviously is trying to adapt its treatment depending on different "types" of customers, instead of just applying a "one size fits all"-solution. However, this segmentation process instead enables a critique in accordance with van der Hart's (1990) who claimed that talking in terms of "target groups" in public management imply that choices might be made between the groups, something that he considered discriminatory.

When the SEA describes its customers as a collective, they are most often described as rather passive and irrational characters. Thus, rather far from the rational, sovereign, and active character that constitutes the conventional idea of the customer (e.g., du Gay & Salaman 1992; Rosenthal and Peccei 2007). Besides, the customers are described as potential threats, resulting in several safety measures. This description is corresponding with the characteristics of the customers in the customer-group "debtors", which might indicate that the organization essentially relate to the "customers" based on the characteristics of the debtors.

If comparing the SEA's description of its customers with the narratives of the customer detected by Rosenthal and Peccei (2007), the description actually has elements of all the three narratives they detect in the NPM-literature. The SEA describes its customers as characters expressing needs that the authority must listen to and be responsive to, as in the narrative presented by "the enthusiasts of entrepreneurial government". The SEA also describes its customers in accordance with the narrative "the quality customer of public services", as the customers are described as so heterogeneous that they must

be segmented. However, perhaps more surprisingly, is that the SEA also describes its customers in a way that can be linked to the narrative that Rosenthal and Peccei call “the customer of the critics of NPM”, as the customers frequently are described as passive, ill-informed, and incapable of knowing what is best for them.

The characteristics of the customer group “creditors” are consistent with the narrative that Rosenthal and Peccei (2007) associate with the enthusiasts of entrepreneurial government, as they (the creditors) are described as active and having a large amount of knowledge, whereas the customers of the customer group “debtors” are described in ways more consistent with the narrative of the critics of NPM. In other words: the “customers of free will”⁷⁸ (i.e., the creditors) are described similar to how the “enthusiasts of entrepreneurial government” see the public service customers: as autonomous, active and rational, while the “unwilling customers” (i.e. the debtors) of the SEA is described similarly to how “the critics of NPM” describe the public sector customers. This indicates that the creditors are easier to treat in accordance with the conventional idea of customers as they are more alike the business sector customer: requiring a service from the organization, a requirement based on well-informed and conscious considerations, while it is more intricate for the authority to relate to the debtors as customers.

Accordingly, the SEA does not, at least not merely, describe its customer in the conventional way, as sovereigns who know what they want and how to act to receive it. Instead, the “customers” of the SEA are described as more complex and more compounded. Thus, the SEA does not adopt the “customer” straight off from the world of business, instead the organization tries to “re-define” the notion, with a tendency to have the debtor in mind, as the debtor probably is the “customer” who most of all is distinguished from the conventional idea of customers. The SEA thus attempts to adapt the notion by underscoring that its customers act and behave differently from how we conventionally expect “customers” to act and behave, still being able to refer to its clients as customers. Signalling that the clients should be “treated as customers” without implying that they (always) behave like the conventional customer, thus being active, choosing, and rational.

However, the customer orientation of the SEA is not only a matter of treating and referring to the clients as “customers”. Another feature of the SEA:s customer orientation is the strive to be responsive to the customers and their needs. Thus, a feature much in accordance with how customer orientation has

⁷⁸ Whether creditors really are customers of the SEA out of free will might of course be discussed, but they have at least actively chosen to file an application to the authority.

been described within the marketing literature as a strategy of listening to the customers and being responsive to their needs (e.g., Kohli & Jaworski 1990; Appiah-Adu & Singh 1998), or in the terminology of Clarke et al. (2007): “the discourse of need”. An essential part of the critique of public sector customer orientation is, at the same time, based on the concern that public organizations that strive to respond to their customers and their needs, might respond to customers who does not know their best, or that the organizations might miss those who “suffer in silence” (e.g., Fountain 2001). This issue is also linked to the “knowledge/power knot” (Clarke et al. 2007), i.e., how to relate to expertise and authority in the relationship between the public and the public organization.

So, does the SEA adopt the discourse of need in a way so that it may avoid this critique? The SEA frequently proclaims that it is the “customers’ needs” that should guide the authority. At the same time, the organization states that the customers do not know their best, and their needs (at least the needs they express) may not be their “true needs”. Hence, the organization, and its employees, must be able to separate between what the customers say they need and what they really need. Therefore, to respond to the customers in this kind of setting becomes a much more complex issue than a corresponding approach in a market setting (where the organization simply may “listen to the customers” and respond to their articulated needs, i.e., what service or product they want). The SEA underscores its awareness that in regard to some of their customers they may not only respond to their explicit requirements, but rather respond to their implicit needs. In other words, in relation to its customers the SEA is the part that can determine what the customers truly needs. This may be interpreted as a way to avoid the critique that customer oriented public organizations might listen to customers who does not know their best. A response to the critique of customers who might “suffer in silence” is, however, harder to find. An interpretation could, perhaps, be that the SEA, by developing different new ways to communicate with its customers also tries to be responsive to the needs of the one who otherwise might “suffer in silence”.

Yet another feature of the SEA’s customer orientation is the aim to create “value” or even “added-value” for its customers. This is a feature of customer orientation that also may be detected in the in the marketing literature, as for instance when Narver & Slater (1990) describe customer orientation as an aim to create “superior value” for the customers, or when Appiah-Adu and Singh (1998) see customer orientation as embedded in a culture of creating value to the customers. The few times the authority approaches an explanation of what “creating value” might imply in practice, it is described as meeting the customers in a way so that the meeting is experienced as positive by the

customer, to be properly prepared for the meeting, and to “outperform” the customers’ expectations. The concept of creating value has not, to my knowledge, been described in any case of a public organization before and therefore the concept has not been discussed or problematized by scholars, but one could dispute the concept’s belonging in a public setting by applying a critique analogous to the one directed against the concept of adapting to the customers and responding to their demands, for what is “value” for the customers if they do not know their true needs? And is the value decided by the SEA? And how do you create a positive experience when you must take coercive measures against the customer? The SEA never explicitly addresses questions like these, and the value creation ends up in an appropriate and polite way of meeting the customers.

The fourth, and final, element that I identified as an important feature of the SEA:s customer orientation is the organization’s strive to adjust the customers. This implies changing the behaviour of the customers so that their behaviour better suits the authority. But it is also about strengthening and activating the customers (as the customer, as seen above, often are described as passive). Of the identified features of the SEA’s description of customer orientation this is probably the most difficult one to link to any conventional description of the concept even if the feature perhaps might be linked to marketing strategies of changing buying patterns or to Alford’s (2002) and Alford and Speed’s (2006) ideas about meeting the public service clients in manners that might induce compliance. Strengthening and activating might then be interpreted as a strategy of having the customers comply with the requirements of the authority instead of having to take coercive, and possibly costly, enforcement measures. This feature of the organization’s customer orientation might perhaps also be linked to the extensive literature on “nudging” (see for instance Thaler & Sunstein 2009).

After having explored the customer orientation of the SEA one may conclude that the customer orientation of the SEA is composed out of different features of which most may be linked to the marketing literature, but the SEA has slightly readjusted the concept so that it better fits into the authority’s context. It might be argued that these are features mostly fit for theory. The SEA may thus be said to fill the concept with content without letting it provide any further practical guidance. Customer orientation is also, as seen in Chapter 3, sometimes criticized for lacking a practical definition that imply how the concept should be operationalized (Duffy, Bruce, Moroko & Groeger 2020). Organisations have, as a result, instead started to adopt more hands-on business models and strategies. A theoretical description is probably sufficient when managing the concept on an organizational, strategical, level, but how about

handling the concept in practice? This question leads us on to the ones that actually must interpret the concept from a more hands-on point of view: the frontline employees of the enforcement procedure, the enforcement officers. How they relate to the customer orientation of the SEA will be explored in the next chapter.

Accordingly, customer orientation may be considered an important guiding rule for how the organization and its employees should act and behave and from the exploration of how customer orientation is described by the SEA one could also extract the demands that the “principle of customer orientation” presents to the organization and its employees; the clients should be treated (and referred to) as customers; the authority and the employees ought to be responsive to the customers and their needs; the strive should be that every meeting with a customer is creating value for the customer, and finally; that the authority, and the employees, in some matters should try to adjust the customers (mainly so that they are able to manage their situation by themselves).

The customer orientation of the SEA is permeated by an “entrepreneurial spirit” (Premfors et al. 2003): the concept is propagating an adaptable and proactive organization that ought to “listen to the customers” so that the organization may achieve success through satisfaction of the customers. Hence, the customer orientation can be seen as a manifestation of an entrepreneurial way of managing the organization. In other words, the customer orientation of the SEA may be considered to be driven by an “entrepreneurial” reform of the organization. With this “entrepreneurial” reform of the organization, comes a hybridization of the organization that, not only includes customer orientation, but also other market-derived principles.

That the SEA is permeated by multiple principles and that the organization, besides the demands of customer orientation, also must manage several other demands, was validated when I presented the guiding principles frequently highlighted by the authority. I have identified five principles that coexist with customer orientation, principles prescribing how the organization and its employees should act and behave. The most prominent principle being a principle of legality. This is a principle presenting demands to employees to always be guided by law, to act legally accurate and legally secure, and thereby ensure that all the authority’ clients are assured a legally accurate and legally secure treatment. The frequent emphasis (especially in intranet-articles) on the authority as an important actor in the work to counteract criminality is another aspect that I have included as an element of a principle of legality, an element that forms an idea of the authority as primarily a law enforcement agency.

Besides these two most prominent, and easiest detectable, guiding principles (customer orientation and the principle of legality) I was also able to find four other principles that present different demands to the organization and its employees how to be organized, how to reason and act and behave etc. These principles I have named *brand orientation*, implying a strive to strengthen and change the organizations brand as well as transforming the internal culture (from seeing the authority as authoritarian and harsh to instead seeing them as service), *a principle of strict procedures*, implying an internal focus and to follow rules of procedures, *a principle of efficiency*, implying a focus to save cost and reduce expenditures (a principle that may be summed up in the organizational slogan “do more with less”), and finally *a principle objectivity*, implying an impartial and equal treatment.

Table 5.2 An overview of the principles of the SEA

Customer Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consider and treat the clients as “customers” - Be responsive to the customers and to the customers’ needs - Create “value” or “added value” for the customers - Adjust the customers
A principle of legality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Act legally secure and legally accurate - Always be “guided by law” (adhere to the current legislation) - Emphasize the counteracting of criminality
A principle of efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Save costs and reduce expenditures - Use resources more efficiently - “Do more with less” - Increase digitalization - Increase quantifiable measures
Brand orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consider and “strengthen” the brand - Change the brand - Strive towards an internal cultural change - Find inspiration in market-organizations
A principle of objectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be objective and impartial - Treat everyone equal and provide similar service - Treat everyone in a factual and correct way
A principle of strict procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on internal procedures - Act according to the “rules of procedures”, obey the internal rules and regulations - Follow the hierarchical order

From this chapter it may thus be concluded that the SEA is describing its customer orientation in a way that may be summed up in four main features,

and that three of these features may be linked to how the concept of customer orientation has been described in the marketing literature. This chapter also confirms that the assumption that the SEA must manage a multiplicity of different demands, as I was able to detect six different principles that all have different underlying ideas and rules and that sets different demands on the organization and the employees on how to act and reason. It is, in this chapter, sometimes indicated that the SEA, is holding the different principles apart and focus on different principles in relation to different topics. In chapter 7 I will further analyse the SEA's hybridity by analysing this coexistence of principles with the help of the institutional logics perspective and I will show if, and why, the authority may be considered as constituting a case of "institutional complexity". There I will also further analyse how the SEA manages the coexistence of principles and their underlying demands.

6 Hybridity at the SEA: A frontline perspective

With this chapter, it is time to enter into the street-level, and turn the gaze towards the public servants working at the frontline of the SEA, more precisely the employees of the enforcement procedure: the employees entitled “enforcement officers” (in Swedish “kronoinpektörer”). This chapter aims to answer how these public servants manage the demands of customer orientation alongside the demands of the other organizational principles that (as seen in the previous chapter) are facing the employees of the SEA. In other words, to explore their response to organizational hybridity.

To be employed as an aspiring enforcement officer at the SEA, you need some kind of undergraduate degree from a university, however, not necessarily any legal education. A part of the educational program that a newly employed aspiring enforcement officer undergoes to become an enforcement officer is, however, a basic course in law (a course held at a university). The requirement to have a degree from a university to be employed as an aspiring enforcement officer was added about 10 – 15 years ago, which is why many enforcement officers who were employed before that does not have a university degree. The enforcement officers are organized in teams of about 15 – 20 officers. Most of the work they perform is team-based, which means that they do not manage their “own” cases. Instead, one officer may initiate an investigation one day, and another officer may take over the next day. Most of the work of the officers may be performed from the office with the help of a custom designed IT-application – an application that allows the officers to access various registers, and with which they can retrieve information from banks and other information sources. A part of the work must, nevertheless, be performed “on the field”, i.e., by leaving the office to meet the debtors. This happens if there are suspicions that the debtors have assets in their homes or elsewhere (assets that may be seized and sold to pay the debts). An enforcement officer has, in accordance with the enforcement code (SFS 1981: 774), the legal right to force his/her way into closed spaces to search for assets, if necessary, by the assistance of a locksmith and/or the police. A work task that also requires a lot

of “field work”, and which requires relatively much of the enforcement officers’ time, is evictions. This work task requires the officers to first serve the tenant the decision that he/she is forced to leave the apartment/premises (something that might require multiple searches for the tenant at his/her home and/or place of work), and after that perform the eviction. Finally, in case the tenant has left his/her belonging in the apartment/premises, the enforcement officer attends the emptying of the apartment/premises.

In the previous chapter, the focus was set on the SEA as an organization, and how the concept of customer orientation permeates the organization alongside five other principles that, just like customer orientation, present various demands to the organization, and its employees. In this chapter, I will first focus on how the enforcement officers experience the customer orientation from their frontline perspective, and how they experience to work in environment of multiple demands. I will then further elaborate how the enforcement officers react to the hybridity.

6.1 A frontline perspective on the customer orientation of the SEA

In the following sections I will present how the customer orientation of the SEA is understood on the frontline and what the enforcement officers think about the most visible manifestation of the customer orientation of the SEA; the re-characterization of the clients into “customers”.

The customer orientation of the SEA, and its different features, is as seen in the previous chapter, permeating the SEA and is often highlighted within the internal communication of the SEA. It is reasonable to assume that very few, if any, of the employees of the SEA have overlooked the fact that the organization they work for is striving to be customer oriented. In addition, no enforcement officer has ever questioned me when I have asked them about the customer orientation of the organization. One question that I have asked the officers is what they believe that the organization wants to imply with the concept of customer orientation. Many have answered that it is supposed to infer a certain treatment of the clients, a treatment in a “customer-like manner”, or the like. Often, they define this manner rather vaguely, and often they link it to the kind of customer relations that one normally associates with business settings. For instance, Lars, an enforcement officer at one of the “special-enforcement teams”, told me that he is associating the concept with having a certain attitude when dealing with the organization’s clients:

Lars: I have interpreted it as if management wants us to treat those who I call 'debtors' and 'creditors' as if they were *customers*, that you have that approach, that you have that attitude

Interviewer: What kind of attitude do you mean?

Lars: That you are service minded, that you treat them with respect and a certain decency.⁷⁹

Sofia, an enforcement officer who had been employed by the SEA for about twenty years, also expressed a similar understanding. She told me that she considers the customer orientation of the SEA as an urge to the employees to approach and treat the clients: "Almost as traditional customers in stores and such". Another officer, who also primarily associated the SEA's customer orientation to a more business-like behaviour towards the clients, was Molly. Before she applied for her current job as an enforcement officer she was working at the authority as a process server. She told me that she believes that the managers want the employees to "treat the ones that they [i.e., the managers] call customers as when you go into a mall". However, she also told me that although she had heard several managers talk about having a "customer perspective", ever since she worked as a process server, she had never really understood what it "ought to imply in practice".

Another relatively common understanding among the enforcement officers of what the customer orientation of the SEA implies is that it, first and foremost, is supposed to be a signal to the employees that they should try to adapt to their clients. This is, for instance, how enforcement officer Elise interprets the concept: "I think it's about adapting...to adapt your approach, and to adapt your language to the debtors". Many of the officers who understand the customer orientation of the SEA in this way also, just like Elise, primarily seem to think that it is a matter of adapting the language. Accordingly, the customer orientation of the organization is, for these officers, considered as an appeal to use a more comprehensible language – a language that the "customers" may understand, instead of using a professional jargon

⁷⁹ Lars: Jag har väl tolkat det som att ledningen vill att man ska behandla dem som jag kallar 'gäldenärer' och 'borgenärer', som om de vore *kunder*, att man har den inställningen, den attityden

Intervjuare: Vilken typ av attityd skulle det vara menar du?

Lars: Att man är serviceinriktad, att man behandlar dem med respekt och en viss artighet.

full of legal terms and expressions that might be perceived as incomprehensible.

Another frequent remark from the officers is that management, by adopting the concept of customer orientation and emphasizing it in the organizational communication, wish to eliminate any negative emotions that might be associated with contacting the authority. If understood this way, the concept is thus more about changing the external image of the authority than being a guideline for how the employees should act and behave. For instance, enforcement officer Mika told me that he considers the customer orientation to be a tactic to make the SEA “a little less frightening and a little less taboo”. Furthermore, Marta, an enforcement officer who had been employed by the SEA for more than 15 years, stated that she considers customer orientation to be a concept applied to change the public attitude towards the authority. She also underscored that the customer orientation of the authority will probably come to facilitate her daily job as... “...more people will dare to contact us, instead of staying away as many do now”. Enforcement officer Nils expressed similar thoughts as he declared that the customer orientation of the organization is a way for the authority to establish a public perception about the organization that is more true to reality than the negative perception that he meant people might tend to have today:

Nils: Maybe we have been seen as some kind of executioner, an evil one, who comes and do things against peoples' will, and I think that they [the authority] want to give a more nuanced image of how it is in reality and how it perhaps has been all the time.⁸⁰

The understanding of customer orientation as a way for the SEA to change how the public sees the organization – or, expressed in another way: to change the *brand* – seems rather widespread among the enforcement officers. Many of the officers who interpret the customer orientation of the organization this way, seem to consider customer orientation as just one element of a bigger transformation of the authority, driven by management. A transformation that thus may be linked to the principle that I, in the previous chapter, have called brand orientation. Enforcement officer Harry, for instance, asserted that management uses customer orientation as way to “rebrand the authority”. He stated that the concept, along with several other elements such as for instance the change of logotype, is a way for the organization to become “softer”. The

⁸⁰ Nils: Kanske har man sett oss som någon sorts bödel, en ond en, som kommer och gör saker mot folks viljor, och jag tror de [myndigheten] vill ge en mer nyanserad bild av hur det är i verkligheten och hur det kanske varit hela tiden.

change of logotype was something that Harry almost immediately brought up when I asked him about the customer orientation of the SEA:

Harry: [The previous logotype] was too authority-like, harsh somehow, so it is supposed to be a little softer and they changed the colours, which are also supposed to be a bit softer. Nowadays everybody is supposed to have green logotypes so you can barely tell the difference between the SEA, the pharmacy and Systembolaget. There are a lot of green logotypes because it is a calming colour, and of course I understand what they were thinking. And customer orientation is a part of this, that is how I have understood it.⁸¹

When I talked to experienced enforcement officers Maria and Svea, both with more than thirty years on duty, I soon noticed that they as well associate the SEA's customer orientation with a more comprehensive brand-oriented change of the organization. Just like Harry, they seemed to believe that the change partially is aiming to tone down the harsh elements of the authority's activities. Maria told me that she believes that the authority has started to "call the clients customers" because of the "same reason as they chose green as colour, a so-called soft colour...they want to take away the fact that we are a coercive authority". Svea told me that she links the organization's customer orientation to a "greater transformation" that includes the change to a logotype that "seems a little softer, green instead of blue and yellow and with softer shapes" – A change that according to her is a part of a strategy of being seen as "soft" instead of as "harsh". Daniel was another Enforcement officer who told me that he interprets the concept of customer orientation as an element of a, as he said it, "re-branding campaign" – A campaign he linked to the more profiled position that the debt-relief unit have come to have as a result of the law concerning debt-relief was changed in 2016, which was a change that enabled more over-indebted people to apply for a debt relief (at the same time as the government wished for an increase of the number of debt-reliefs).

Daniel: I don't know if they are trying to change the SEA's role a little bit from being a *debt collector* into becoming a *debt reliever*, and that people should see

⁸¹ Harry: [Den tidigare logotypen] var för myndighetsaktig, hård liksom, så det ska vara lite mjukare och man förändrar färger, som också ska vara lite mjukare. Nuförtiden ska ju alla ha gröna loggor så att man knappt kan skilja mellan Kronofogden, apoteket och Systembolaget, det är väldigt mycket gröna loggor, för det är en lugnande färg och jag förstår hur man har tänkt naturligtvis. Och kundorientering är ju en del i det, så har jag uppfattat det.

it more as a possibility to become free from debt again and that is why the debt relief unit is so much in focus...that is just my guess why they talk so much about the customer perspective nowadays.⁸²

Furthermore, that the customer orientation of the organization among the enforcement officers often is interpreted as a part of a bigger transformation of the organization has also been reflected in several of my fieldnotes. I have many times written down remarks on how the officers seem to think that management is trying to change the organization into “something else”. Often, they seem to associate this change with a will to be a more market-similar or corporate-like organization, and that the customer orientation of the organization (that they then associate with market-settings) merely is one aspect of this change (field notes).

6.1.1 The enforcement officers and the notion of “customers”

As seen in the previous chapter a feature of the customer orientation of the SEA that is particularly prominent, is the idea that the clients of the organization ought to be treated, as well as actually referred to, as “customers”. Earlier research has concluded that public servants often apply different, and sometimes inconsistent, definitions of whom the “customers” of the organizations they work for are (e.g., Needham 2006; Rosenthal & Peccei 2006). It has also frequently been described how the naming of the public service users often is associated with distress among many public servants (e.g., Clarke et al. 2007). Accordingly, an apt question to ask is how the enforcement officers of the SEA respond to the fact that the organization in its communication is referring to the people they meet during work as “customers”?

During every day work conversations between colleagues (i.e., between enforcement officers) my experience, as an enforcement officer myself, is that the clients never (or at least extremely seldom) are referred to as customers. Instead, the clients are named depending on their relation to the SEA (i.e., as “debtors or “creditors” and “defendants” or “applicants”). To talk in terms of

⁸² Daniel: Jag vet inte om man försöker förändra Kronofogdens roll lite från att vara en skuldindrivande till att vara en skuldreglerande och att folk ska kanske mer se det som en möjlighet att bli skuldfria igen och att det är därför man har skuldsanering så mycket i fokus...det är bara min gissning varför dom pratar så mycket om kundperspektivet nuförtiden.

“customers” would probably, at least during causal conversations, be considered confusing or signalling inexperience, or perhaps even lack of knowledge (field notes). On several occasions, during conversations with the enforcement officers, has it been obvious that using terms such as “customers” can be confusing, as I have been requested to explain what I mean, or how I define a “customer” in this context. For instance, when I asked an officer if she believed that the SEA lives up to its strive to be “customer oriented”, and she looked at me perplexed and asked: “Are you talking about the debtors then? Or what *customers* are you actually talking about?”

That talking in terms of customers may be experienced as confusing among some officers was also implied in a comment made by enforcement officer Sofia. She told me that she experiences it “extremely annoying” that the SEA’s customer-service personnel sometimes connect calls to her by saying that there is “a customer on the line”. This becomes a problem as she cannot know whether the caller is an “applicant, defendant, or a lawyer...it could be basically anyone”. Enforcement officer Stina was another officer who accentuated that the notion of customers just would cause confusion if used during regular job conversations:

Stina: In case I use that term [“customer”] a colleague will immediately ask: ‘which type of customer do you mean?’ It’s so obvious what you want to say or having said in a conversation when one starts by saying ‘the debtor called’. ‘The customer called’...but who? Which customer?⁸³

Quite often the enforcement officers, in this way, seem to assess the notion of customers based on how (un)suitable they consider the notion to be in daily work. This is demonstrated by how several officers, as the topic of the customer notion has been brought up, have told me about some colleague or colleagues of theirs who consistently have been talking (or writing) in terms of “customers” during work. This anecdote has then become an example of how the notion of customers is confusing, or how it is causing misunderstandings, when used in daily job communication:

⁸³ Stina: Om jag använder det uttrycket [”kund”] så kommer en kollega genast ifrågasätta ’vilken typ av kund menar du?’. Det är så självklart vad man vill säga eller ha sagt i ett samtal när man säger att ’gäldenären ringde. ’Kunden ringde’... men vem? Vilken kund?

Elise: This was when [name of co-worker] came back from [working in a private company]. I know that back then, he always wrote like that [“customers”]... but we [his colleagues] were never really able to follow him because one never really knew in the case notes who he was talking about.⁸⁴

David: There are some officers who write *customer* instead of debtor and creditor in their case notes ...and those notes become completely incomprehensible.⁸⁵

As seen, some of the enforcement officers are hesitant to the idea of talking in terms of “customers” during work, motivated by the vagueness of the notion. As it does not determine what relationship the person has with the organization and as it might cause misunderstandings. This is, however, not the most commonly expressed reason to why many officers say that they are hesitant towards using the notion in reference to the authority’s clients. An even more common reason to why many enforcement officers say that they are hesitant towards using the notion of customers, why some even seem to feel reluctance towards the idea of referring to the clients as customers, is that the notion for many of them is so deeply associated with the role a customer has within a business setting. Thus, the notion evokes connotations of voluntariness and option among many officers. These connotations make many officers uncomfortable using “customers” in reference to the people they met during work, where they often have to meet unwilling or grudging people that has no freedom of choice. For instance, enforcement officer Kia told me that the term “customer”, for her, is signalling voluntariness, and that voluntariness certainly is not something that she associates with most of the people she meets during her workdays: “I choose to be a customer of ICA [food store] or I choose to be a customer of H&M [clothes store], but I definitely don’t choose to be a customer of the SEA”. Similarly, enforcement officer Mats told me that he associates the notion of customers with “a free market”, and that “a customer”, according to him, is someone who is having several options to choose between: “But our clients...most often they have no options at all [...] so I think that the notion as such is inappropriate to use here at our authority”.

⁸⁴ Elise: Detta var när [namn på kollega] kom tillbaka från [arbete på privat företag]. Jag vet att då skrev han så... men vi andra [hans kollegor] kunde inte riktigt haka på för att man visste inte riktigt i noteringarna vem han pratade om.

⁸⁵ David: Det finns inspektörer som skriver *kund* i sina handläggarnoteringar istället för gäldenär och borgenär...och de blir helt obegripliga dom där noteringarna

There are also enforcement officers who experience the notion of customers to be offensive or provocative for the clients, particularly for the unwilling ones (i.e., debtors). In other words, they believe that the clients would be offended if they openly would be called “customers of the SEA”. A recurrent remark from these enforcement officers is that the term is offensive as “nobody really wants to be in debt”, which is a comment that again indicates that the term “customer” for them is signalling voluntariness. An officer I talked to went even further in this argumentation and rhetorically asked me if a person that has been in debt for ten years should be called a “loyal customer”.

Several enforcement officers have also told me that they feel as if the notion of customers is especially difficult in situations when they must decide about, and even use, coercive measures. Enforcement officer Sofia, for instance, told me that a customer for her is someone who has a relationship with an organization of free will, and therefore she just cannot reconcile the idea of referring to the clients as customers with the coercive measures that she so often has to take during her work:

Sofia: When we evict people, when we sell peoples' homes, when we take their belongings - that is exercising authority. Of course, this can be done in a very decent and respectable manner but... well, I cannot say that I work with *customers*...⁸⁶

In a similar way, enforcement officer Kia stated: “It feels terrible to take coercive measures against a customer... It feels better to take coercive measures against a debtor”. The most palpable coercive measure that the enforcement officers sometimes have to enforce is probably, as previously mentioned, to evict someone from their home or premises. Evictions has also frequently been brought up when I have discussed the SEA's use of the notion of customers with the officers, often as an example of why they find it hard to apply the notion during daily work. For instance, David rhetorically asked me, somewhat sarcastically, if someone that he evicts is a customer: “Is it a customer then? Is it an eviction-customer?”. In a similar manner, Isak explained that he had difficulties to unite with the thought of “working with service and customers” when having to evict a family with children. When I asked Leo about his thoughts on the authority referring to the clients as “customers”, he also immediately linked the notion to evictions:

⁸⁶ Sofia: När vi avhyser, när vi säljer folks bostäder, när vi tar deras grejer, det är ju myndighetsutövning. Självklart kan man göra det väldigt anständigt med stor respekt men... ja, det känns inte som att jag kan beskriva det som att jag arbetar med kunder...

Leo: A debtor who I evict, who doesn't want to be evicted, who doesn't want anything to do with me, we don't even talk to each other. I have a really hard time considering that person a customer... The fact that I'm making someone homeless, in some way that's just hard, it hasn't added anything...⁸⁷

Some enforcement officers also seem to find it difficult to reconcile the demand to be objective and impartial and their role as a neutral part between two or more opposing wills, with the idea of referring to the clients as customers. Often these officers might acknowledge that the notion of customers might be used in other SEA departments; however, they do not think it is appropriate to use within the enforcement procedure. Accordingly, these officers acknowledge that the clients might be referred to as customers in departments of the SEA that only have one category of "customers" to consider; Departments in where the employees are not stuck between the requirements of multiple stakeholders. Several officers have given the SEA's sales department as an example of a department that might use the notion of customers without any inconvenience (the department that is selling seized property in public auctions, a department that have customer relations that, perhaps, are more similar to the ones of the business sector). Some officers also seem to think that the term possibly might suit the creditors (as they pay for a service), however, not the debtors (as they are in an involuntarily relationship with the authority).

The fact that many enforcement officers are hesitant to the idea of referring to the SEA's clients as customers was also further supported when I visited an office located at the middle of Sweden and talked to enforcement officer Malin. When we started the interview, she almost immediately proclaimed that she and her colleagues "certainly never use the notion of customers during work". It was obvious that she, based on the topic of the interview (she knew we would talk about the customer orientation of the SEA), wanted to have this said, so that there would be no misconception about her position in relation to this matter. She told me that she often feels as if the language differs between the organizational levels: "We, who are working with the 'customers', we never use the notion of customers [laughter], it's those who stand above us who do it very much...", and she told me an anecdote that she meant had reinforced this feeling for her:

⁸⁷ Leo: En gäldenär som jag avhyser, som inte vill bli avhyst, som inte vill ha någonting med mig att göra, vi pratar inte ens med varandra, jag har jättesvårt att anse att det är en kund... Att jag gör någon hemlös, det är bara jobbigt på något sätt, det har inte tillfört något...

Malin: We had a woman here, a manager from the main office, she was here for one day, and she never said 'debtor', she always just said 'customer'... So, it felt kind of like *political correctness*, I feel like there's a difference there...

Interviewer: What was your response to that, when she spoke like that?

Malin: Well...she can go on talking like that [laughter]... However, we won't begin to say customer just because of that, it's so anchored among us to say 'debtor'... I believe someone ought to explain a little more about why we should change this now, what happens to people if we change this, will it be better for us and for them if we change this? I mean... not just [said with a deep voice:] 'now, we will start to call every debtor a customer' ... Yeah damn good [her emphasis], but why? We might as well call them something else then...⁸⁸

What I found most interesting about Malin's anecdote was how she and her colleagues handled this situation, therefore, I took the chance to ask her more about how they reacted to this management employee's choice of words:

Interviewer: But was this something that you talked about, that she talked like that, or did you just let it pass?

Malin: Well, we laughed about it. I remember that we noticed it and laughed and said 'damn... calling them customers...'. But we know people do that, it's not that. However, it's just so obvious when she arrives here having worked for two years at the main office. I'm sure she has been taught from the beginning that it's supposed to be our 'customers'.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Malin: Vi hade en tjej här, en chef från HK, hon var här under en dag, och hon sa ju aldrig 'gäldenär', hon sa ju alltid bara 'kund' ...så det kändes liksom lite *politiskt korrekt*. Jag känner att det finns en skillnad där...

Intervjuare: Hur bemötte ni det då, när hon sa så?

Malin: Ja, men hon kan ju fortsätta prata så [skratt]. Alltså vi börjar ju inte säga kund för det, det sitter så förankrat att säga 'gäldenär' ... Jag tror att någon skulle behöva gå ut lite bättre och förklara varför ska vi ändra det här nu, vad sker med människor om vi ändrar det här, blir det bättre för oss och för dom om vi ändrar det här? Jag menar... inte bara [sagt med en mörk röst:] 'nu ska vi börja kalla alla gäldenärer för kund' ...Ja, men skitbra varför det? Vi kan väl lika gärna kalla dem för något annat då...

⁸⁹ Intervjuare: Men var det något ni pratade om, om att hon sa så, eller lät ni det bara passera?

Malin: Nja, vi garvade ju åt det. Jag kommer ihåg att vi registrerade det och garvade, och sa 'fan kallar dem för kunder' liksom... Men vi vet ju att folk gör det, alltså det är inte det. Men det blir bara så uppenbart när hon kommer hit och har jobbat två år på huvudkontoret. Jag tror säkert att hon fått lära sig det från början att det ska vara våra 'kunder'.

I have asked the many officers who does not feel comfortable using the notion of customers what notions they instead prefer to use when they talk about the people they meet during work. They have almost exclusively answered that they prefer to use notions that clearly determine what relationship the person they talk about has towards the organization (such as, as mentioned above, “debtors” and “creditors etc.). Many of them have also referred to the law and proclaimed that they prefer to use a terminology that also is used in legal writings. When I, for instance, asked enforcement officer Samuel what notions he prefers to use when he talks about the people he meets during his workdays, he instantly replied that he prefers to use notions such as “applicant”, “debtor” and “defendant” because “this is in accordance with the text of the law”. And when I talked to enforcement officer Anton about the authority’s frequent use of the notion of customers, he told me that he does not feel comfortable referring to the people he meets during work as “customers” because it would require him to “re-learn” what he already knows:

Anton: ...in legislative texts and books and everything, it is named in a certain way, and to start using a new expression would require that someone would change all the background material to release the clutches one has in one’s brain on certain matters.⁹⁰

As noticed, there is a rather widespread hesitation among the officers against using the customer notion. Nonetheless, it is also important to recognize that I also have met a few officers who have incorporated the notion of customers into their professional terminology, and who seem to be using the notion during daily work. One of these officers was Olof, who when I talked to him declared that he could not recognise any reason at all why he should not be able to consider, and refer to, neither the debtors nor the creditors as “customers”, not even when he is being forced to decide about coercive measures:

⁹⁰ Anton: ... i lagtexter och alla böcker och allting så benämns det ju på ett specifikt sätt, och att börja använda ett nytt uttryck för det tror jag att det kräver att någon ställer om allt bakgrundsmaterial för att få en att släppa de uppkopplingar man har i hjärnan på vissa saker.

Olof: Well...the debtor is a customer in such a way that he has the right to be treated in a certain way and expect certain things when it comes to our administration and that we should act in a certain way and so on. He [the customer] has the right to expect that we will follow the order of seizing and take as few coercive measures as possible.⁹¹

6.1.2 The demands of customer orientation from a frontline perspective

Do the enforcement officers believe that the authority lives up to the demands of customer orientation? Also, how do the enforcement officers handle the demands of customer orientation during their daily work? Even if the concept of customer orientation permeates the organization's internal communication, many enforcement officers seem to feel as if customer orientation, in practice, actually is not the organization's main priority. Instead, many officers seem to think that the authority puts economy and efficiency first, even if this might entail that the customers receive a poorer service. The SEA has, for instance, during recent years, been downsizing and closing several offices (mainly in some smaller cities and Stockholm suburbs). The decision to reduce the number of the authority's offices is something I have heard several officers present as an example of why they feel that the organization not always has the "customers' focus" (as the organizational slogan says). While conducting this study, there has also been periods when there have been almost endlessly long telephone queues to the SEA's customer-service. Sometimes when callers have tried to reach the authority's customer-service they have just been connected to an answering-machine saying that they must call again later. This is also something that I have heard officers commented on in response to claims from the organization that it is striving to be customer oriented (field notes).

The feeling that economy and efficiency have a higher priority than the customers, was also indicated by enforcement officer Mats' answer to my question whether he considered the SEA to have the "customer's focus". In his answer, he recognized a feeling that a fast (and, from his point of view, rather hasty) process is what the customers (i.e., the applicants) receive from the SEA today:

⁹¹ Olof: Jo...gäldenären är ju kund på det sättet att man har ju rätt att förvänta sig att bli hanterad på ett visst sätt, att handläggningen ska vara på ett visst sätt och att vi ska vara på ett visst sätt och så vidare. Han [kunden] har rätt att förvänta sig att vi ska följa utmättningsordningen och använda så lite tvångsåtgärder som möjligt.

Mats: Well... it depends on what you mean by it. I mean, if you look at what we do in the enforcement procedure today, what does it mean to have the customer's focus here? Is it to... as we work today... If you send in a case for enforcement and then you receive an investigation report in which it is stated that the SEA has checked two registers and then finished the investigation the same day, and this costs you 600 kronor. If the authority believes that is having the customer's focus, well then yes, then I think that we live up to the concept.⁹²

When asked about the customer orientation of the SEA, and the organization's ability to live up to this approach, many of the officers have also brought up the accounting department. While conducting this study the accounting department was for a while struggling with a high workload and the employees at the department had to handle large balances which led to the registrations of many payments being delayed. This became a problem for the enforcement officers as they sometimes were forced to handle furious people that claimed that they had paid a debt that was still registered for enforcement. This also resulted in a great number of complaints and some media attention. The SEA, when the delays were at its worse, published an article on the intranet where the employees were requested to "act uniformly", "be accessible and always answer the telephone", and to be "responsive and understanding to the problems we have created for the customers" (Intr. 30-08-2017). In a decision dated the 15th of November 2017, the Parliamentary Ombudsmen, following the delays at the accounting department, directed serious criticism towards the SEA and stated that the SEA has failed to live up to the requirements set on the authority to act legally secure. In its response to the Parliamentary Ombudsmen, the SEA wrote that the failures were, among other things, the results of lacking "customer focus". It was these delays, the criticism from the Parliamentary Ombudsmen, along with the response from the SEA, that several of the officers brought up when I asked them whether the SEA manages to be customer oriented in practice. One interview session was also performed in a time when this was a hot topic on the authority, which probably was reflected in many of the answers:

⁹² Mats: Ja... alltså det är ju lite vad man lägger i det, för jag menar tittar man på vad vi gör på verkställigheten idag, vad är det att ha kundens fokus här? Är det att... som vi arbetar idag... Om du skickar in ett mål för verkställighet och så får du en utredningsrapport där det framgår att Kronofogden har tittat i två register sen har man avslutat utredningen på samma dag och detta kostar dig 600 kronor, om myndigheten tycker att det är att ha kundens fokus, ja då lever vi ju upp till den devisen.

Sofia: No, I don't think that the authority today has 'the customer in focus' due to how things have been handled at the accounting department. Because that is where it happens, so to speak. That's where you see the results of our work.⁹³

Nora: We've had enormous balances, not to mention the accounting department, so you can't really say that we have been customer oriented... because we have failed... Even though we, here on the 'floor', struggle, definitely, to make things as good as possible, you apologize all day long when you are on the telephone line.⁹⁴

When asked whether they, themselves, are customer oriented many of the officers have underscored that they really aim to live up to the slogan of having the "customers' focus"; However, often these statements are followed by an enumeration of the obstacles they think stand in the way for a customer oriented behaviour. For instance, an officer I talked to proclaimed that she certainly tries to have a "customer approach" when performing her work. However, she immediately also added that the reality she is facing often is far more complex than it may seem if one only reads the statements written in the authority's strategies: "It sounds so easy when it's written on a piece of paper, but to be honestly, these strategies they don't always make sense". When I asked enforcement officer Harry whether the authority and the employees today are acting customer oriented, he replied that the authority really has struggled to be customer oriented "in some practical sense", in regard to being accessible and to always staff the telephone lines. At the same time, he admitted that acting customer oriented in practical conditions is difficult for him and his colleagues, mainly because of the efficiency requirements imposed on the employees:

⁹³ Sofia: Nej, jag tycker inte att myndigheten idag har 'kunden i fokus' med tanke på hur det skötts på medelshanteringen. För det är ju där det händer, så att säga. Det är ju där resultatet av vårt arbete är.

⁹⁴ Nora: Vi har haft enorma balanser, medelshanteringen ska vi inte tala om, och då kan man ju inte säga att vi varit direkt kundorienterade... för där har vi ju brustit... Även om vi på golvet kämpar, definitivt, för att det ska bli så bra som möjligt, man ber om ursäkt dagarna i ända när man sitter i slingan.

Harry: Because of the increasing stress and workload, I don't think that we have as much time to spend on each customer as we should have... so this whole 'customer in focus', yeah sure, as long as it doesn't take more than three minutes. I believe that our co-workers try their best, but they also know that the time that I focus on this customer means that I must spend less time with the next customer... and often, it is the one that screams the loudest that gets the most attention.⁹⁵

There are also some officers who seem to feel that a concept such as customer orientation is not at all compatible with the setting they work in, and rather than trying to understand it, and live up to the demands of customer orientation, they immediately dismiss the concept. Enforcement officer Samuel, for instance, was very explicit with his dislike of the customer orientation of the organization and the demands that the concept presents to him and his colleagues. One could even say that he expressed an aversion towards the SEA applying such a concept, and it seemed as if the demands coming with the concept just did not go along with his view of the enforcement officer's role and assignments. When I talked to him about the customer orientation of the SEA, he told me that he had thought quite a lot about it, but that he, nevertheless, could not understand why SEA would apply this kind of concept. He explained that he initially had heard about the concept when the former vice director-general was giving a speech about the organization's future. In that speech, she described customer orientation as a way to get the employees to view the people they came in contact with from an external perspective, and at this point, Samuel thought this seemed like a wise strategy. What later made him change his mind was the feeling that management quickly started to increase their use of the terminology associated with the concept in their communication, although he had hoped that it rather would decay with time "...but unfortunately it has just increased during the journey, and it has escalated into some damn absurdity". Samuel's aversion towards the customer orientation and its impact on the communication of the SEA was further revealed when I asked him if he believe that the authority lives up to its strategy of having the "customer in focus":

⁹⁵ Harry: På grund av den ökade stressen och arbetsbördan så tycker jag inte att vi har så mycket tid att lägga ner på varje kund som vi kanske borde ha. Så att det här med 'kunden i fokus', ja, upp till en viss gräns så länge det inte tar mer än tre minuter ungefär. Jag tror våra medarbetare gör så gott de kan men de vet ju också att den tiden jag låter den här kunden stå i fokus innebär att jag måste ge mindre tid till nästa kund... och ofta blir det ju den som skriker högst som får mest uppmärksamhet.

Samuel: Well... that's a bit tricky... because in my world, in my truth or reality, there is no such thing as a customer [of the SEA] ... so it's really hard for me to answer, because I don't even know what the authority means when it says 'customer'. It's so damn silly [Samuel's emphasis] in some way, or childish or whatever you can say, so it's difficult to answer at all.⁹⁶

Another enforcement officer who also indicated that the demands of customer orientation, from his frontline point of view, felt as more or less impossible to live up to, was David. When I talked to him about the SEA's customer orientation, he explained that he just could not manage to fit the demands to act customer oriented into the requirements that are set by law:

David: If you have sent in a case to the SEA, you want it enforced. That is what is most important, and we shall as far as possible within the borders of the law make that happen and collect the money, and then we are supposed to protect everybody's right within that. It has nothing to do with this 'customerization', it's a totally reversed logic...⁹⁷

Just like Samuel, David seemed to consider the SEA's adoption of customer orientation as an indication that the activities are not being taken seriously and several times during our conversation, he emphasized his "important role as a public servant" – something he seemed to believe that management neglect when they stress the concept of customer orientation:

David: I once read on Utsökt [the intranet] 'think 'customer' and it will most likely be accurate'. That was the most stupid thing I've ever read. How is it supposed to be accurate if I think customer? I'm a public servant and responsible for the collection of state taxes and the financing of hospitals, schools, and everything alike. I take that seriously and I don't get the feeling that those people that came up with this... [they] don't take it seriously, they

⁹⁶ Samuel: Det är det som är lite tricky här... för att... i min värld, i min sanning eller verklighet så finns det inte någon kund... så det är jättesvårt för mig att besvara för jag vet inte ens vad myndigheten menar när man säger 'kund'. Det är så jävla tramsigt på något sätt, eller barnsligt eller vad man ska säga, så det är svårt att säga överhuvudtaget.

⁹⁷ David: Skickar man in ett ärende till Kronofogden så vill man ha det verkställt. Det är det viktigaste, och vi ska i möjligaste mån inom ramens rämärke få det gjort och få in pengarna, och sen ska vi tillvarata alla rättigheter inom det. Det har ingenting med det här 'kunderiet' att göra, det är en helt omvänd logik...

just sit there and play around, because you cannot have a mental picture like that when you work at an authority that manages important things such as this.⁹⁸

As seen above, many enforcement officers understand the customer orientation of the SEA as a signal that the clients should be treated in a certain “customer-like manner”, i.e., a manner linked to business relations. I have heard several officers comment that they consider it difficult to apply this kind of manner in the environment they work and towards the clients they meet. However, remarkably many officers have also been quick to add that they strive to be service-oriented when they interact with clients during work. A demand to act service-oriented is thus something that they impose on themselves, even those who feel that the concept of customer orientation is difficult to apply within the environment in which they work (field notes). I asked the enforcement officers what the statement “I have a customer perspective in everything I do” means to them, and whether this statement have any influence on how they behave (this is a statement that, at the time, were functioning as a topic for discussion in “the performance and development plan”, a document that the employees were supposed to go through with their manager). Many of them replied that they believe that it implies some kind of service-orientation towards the clients. At the same time, many of them were also quick to underscore that service-orientation comes naturally for them. Therefore, they seemed to mean, that the statement is more or less irrelevant to them as service-orientation is a behaviour that they would have had strived for regardless of if it is stated in any organizational documents. This kind of reasoning was also indicated in the reply I got from Nora, an enforcement officer that had been employed at the SEA for more than 25 years. She told me that she has had a “customer-perspective long before the perspective appeared in any strategy document” and that she has always felt that it is of great importance to always act helpful and service-oriented towards the clients. Therefore, for her, the authority’s increased focus on customer orientation just felt as a confirmation that she has been acting correctly the whole time:

⁹⁸ David: Jag läste någon gång på Utsökt [intranätet] ’tänk ’kund’ så blir det ofta rätt’. Det var det dummaste jag läst. Hur skulle det kunna bli rätt om jag tänker kund? Jag är statstjänsteman och ansvarig för indrivningen av skattemedel till staten och försörjningen av sjukhus, skolor och allting sådant där. Det tar jag på allvar och jag får inte känslan av att människorna som har gjort det här... [De] tar inte det här på allvar, att de sitter och leker, för den mentala bilden kan man inte ha om man jobbar på en myndighet med viktiga saker som det här är.

Nora: Personally, I've always had it [a customer perspective]. It has been a part of why I love my job, because you can make a difference... The authority has not always had this way of thinking, but now... We have started to strive towards it and I think that is very positive!⁹⁹

The wish “to make a difference”, or to help people in a difficult situation, has often been highlighted by the officers that I have talked to as a reason to why they like their job. I have heard several officers underscore that this wish is directing their treatment of the clients more than any organizational strategy (fieldnotes).

On the contrary, even if there are many officers who feel that the demands of customer orientation are difficult to live up to, and others who immediately dismiss the concept, there are also (just as with the notion of customers) a few enforcement officers who say that customer orientation is a concept that they have embraced. That it is a concept that are guiding them during their work. Enforcement officer Olof for instance, who, as seen above, also could not see any reason as to why the authority should not refer to the clients as customers, revealed that he could see several advantages with the customer orientation of the authority during his work in the enforcement procedure. Customer orientation, from his point of view, entail a “predictability and clarity in the way people are treated”. He told me that the concept for him functions as a signal that he and his colleagues must balance the requirements from the debtors with the requirements from the creditors. According to Olof, the authority's customer orientation, including the use of the customer notion, has been successful in building a certain mind-set or culture within the organization. When I asked him whether the authority's customer orientation in any way affect him during his daily work, he promptly replied:

⁹⁹ Nora: Personligen har jag alltid haft det [ett kundperspektiv]. Det har varit en del av varför jag älskar mitt jobb, för att man kan göra skillnad... Myndigheten har inte haft det tänket hela tiden, men nu... Vi har börjat jobba mot det och det tycker jag är väldigt positivt!

Olof: Yes, I would say it does. This is something that is very clear from the authority's management: that this is what we must work on and that this is important, and it permeates the operation all the way. Not least my team manager reminds both himself and us of this, all the time. That it's important that we can't always perhaps choose ourselves, but we have to... must adapt to the existing needs and expectations.¹⁰⁰

Another enforcement officer who could not think of any obstacles to act customer oriented in this kind of setting was Adam, who first explained that in case he would think of the concept in "the traditional way" (in his words: "that all customers would leave satisfied") then it would be difficult to apply the concept because "...after all, we use coercive measures and of course it will be difficult to always make both parties satisfied". However, as he saw the customer orientation of the SEA as an urge to him and his colleagues to "act professional and fair", he also felt that it is a concept that is relevant in this kind of work. Several officers that I have talked to have also emphasized that coercive measures and enforcement decisions may be performed in a "customer oriented manner". For instance, by always communicating with the ones concerned in a plain and simple language. A recurring comment from these enforcement officers has been that being customer oriented is about being open about what is happening. That it is about explaining why things happen in a certain way and describing to the "customer" how he/she can file an appeal. Thus, according to Adam, to provide the clients with "service within the boundaries of the law". Enforcement officer Elsa was another officer who told me that she cannot see any obstacle to acting customer oriented during her daily work. From her comments one could detect that she associated customer orientation in this environment with acting objectively and correctly:

Elsa: You should do what is best for every part so that the applicants get their money and so that the decisions are as good as possible and as close to the debtor's financial capacity as possible. It shouldn't favour anyone in any direction. Then you may say you are acting customer oriented.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Olof: Ja, det skulle jag säga att det gör. Det här är någonting som är så tydligt från myndighetens ledning att det här ska vi arbeta med och det här är viktigt, och det genomsyrar ju verksamheten hela vägen. Inte minst min teamchef påminner ju både sig själv och oss om det här, hela tiden. Att det är viktigt att vi kan inte alltid kanske välja själva utan vi måste... måste anpassa oss efter vilka behov och förväntningar som finns.

¹⁰¹ Elsa: Du ska göra det så bra som möjligt för alla parter så att sökande ska få in sina pengar och besluten ska vara så bra som möjligt och ligga så nära gäldenärens ekonomiska

6.2 Working in an environment of multiple principles: conflicting demands

In case the leading, and coexisting, guiding principles of the SEA imply demands that somehow conflict, this ought to be detected on the frontline and by the enforcement officers, since they are the ones who in their daily work must manage the demands of the principles in practice. Two principles that present demands that seem to conflict, according to many officers, are the two most prominent ones: legality and customer orientation. This conflict between the demands of the most prominent guiding rules of the authority's communication is revealed by how the many officers, of whom hold legality high, sometimes have difficulties handling the demands of customer orientation.

Several enforcement officers that I have talked to have indicated that the demands of customer orientation sometimes is difficult to reconcile with the demands prescribed by law. For example, Samuel told me that he considers his obligations as an enforcement officer to be "locked within legal frames", and as customer orientation for him means to be able to "make a deal", it conflicts with the obligation to strictly follow law and legal prescriptions. Similarly, enforcement officer Isak said that he cannot understand how he should be able to "focus on the customers" as any suggestions to a solution made by the "customers" (such as a payment plan) most often must be instantly rejected: "Not because we aren't customer-friendly but because we neither can nor may approve this according to law". This feeling of a conflict between customer orientation and legal demands may also be detected in enforcement officer Astrid's answer to my question whether she felt as if she can have the "customer in focus" while performing her work:

Astrid: [Laughter] If I can have the customer in focus? Well... it's a nice thought, but it clashes with our instructions for how to work. We have no discretion to be like 'we can give you three months from today to try to settle this by yourself' ...we have no such discretion.

Interviewer: So, it is the regulations that are setting the limits?

kapacitet som möjlig. Det ska liksom inte gynna någon åt någondera håll. Då kan man säga att man är kundorienterad.

Astrid: Yes, they have their two weeks and then the debt must be paid, and then we are supposed to begin our investigation. Of course, you can be nice in your way of communicating this but you have no way of handling a customer or being nicer or 'I will take that away' or 'of course you are given another chance'... I think that is what clashes a bit, when you think about the customer concept in other cases. 'This wasn't good, well then you may change it'. That isn't possible in our activities.¹⁰²

Similarly, one may detect a feeling of a conflict between working according to law and being responsive to the customers, in enforcement officer Harry's reflections on his possibility to provide the SEA's clients with the "services" they require. It is apparent that he finds this, more or less, impossible:

Harry: Many times, it's not enough. The service they require is something we can't give them. 'Take away my debts', that's not possible. 'Make sure that the attachment of my salary is reduced', that's not possible. We cannot give you that service. We can tell you how it works, we can give you advice, but the service that you want, we cannot give you...¹⁰³

Harry also told me that he believes that although the talk about customer orientation has increased in the SEA's communication, his and his colleagues' chances to act customer oriented have always been restricted by law. I asked him if he means that the organizational slogan of having the "customers' focus" thus actually conflicts with legal requirements:

¹⁰² Astrid: [Skratt] Om jag kan ha kunden i fokus? Alltså... det är en fin tanke men det krockar med våra direktiv över hur vi ska jobba. Vi har inget spelrum liksom att 'vi kan ge dig tre månader på dig att försöka lösa det här själv, nåt sådant spelrum finns inte.

Intervjuare: Så det är regelverket som sätter stopp?

Astrid: Ja, de har sina två veckor som skulden ska vara betald och sen ska vi påbörja vår utredning. Sedan kan man ju vara trevlig i sitt sätt att framföra det, men man har ju inget sätt att hantera en kund eller vara snällare eller 'jag plockar bort det där' eller 'det är klart du får en ny chans'. Det är det som krockar litegrann om man tänker på kundbegreppet i andra fall. 'Det här tycker inte jag var något bra. Ja, men då får du byta den'. Det finns ju inte i vår verksamhet.

¹⁰³ Harry: Ofta så räcker det inte. Den service de vill ha är något vi inte kan ge dem. 'Ta bort mina skulder', det går ju inte. 'Se till så att jag får mindre löneutmätning', det går ju inte. Vi kan inte ge dig den servicen. Vi kan tala om hur det fungerar, och vi kan ge dig förslag, men den fulla servicen du vill ha kan vi inte ge dig...

Harry: The customer may be in focus as long as the customer understands our rules and how we reason and accepts them. *Then* the customer may be in focus. If the customer has any other opinions, then, of course, there is a conflict...¹⁰⁴

Demands of efficiency (including an increased focus on quantifiable measures) sometimes also seem to, from the enforcement officers' perspective, conflict with the demands to act legally accurate and legally secure. This is demonstrated by how the officers often are claiming that legal security is at risk when the managers are, as they experience it, constantly hunting for numbers. The enforcement officers thus feel that they struggle to maintain legal security due to increased demands to act efficiently and fast. A feeling revealed by sometimes intense discussions about how to balance demands of an increased number of conducted investigations with legal security. I have heard several comments from enforcement officers about how the SEA neglects legal aspects when demanding an increased "production" (field notes). One interviewee that also expressed this kind of concern was David:

David: Now, we are chasing numbers like idiots. We have lost our mission to collect money in a legally secure and qualitative way so that our foreclosures are valid in court and that we make reliable, offensive decisions. We don't do that anymore.¹⁰⁵

Yet another conflict of demands occurs, according to some enforcement officers, between the demands of customer orientation and the demands to be objective. This conflict is, for instance, exposed in enforcement officer Victor's answer to my question whether he believed that he and his colleagues live up to the SEA's strategy of being customer focused: "My role is to be impartial between two [parts] who often totally disagree about what should be done... This makes it somehow difficult to be customer focused". A similar thought is also detected in the answer enforcement officer Daniel gave to my question whether he feels that it is possible to act customer oriented during his work:

¹⁰⁴ Harry: Kunden kan vara i fokus så länge kunden förstår våra regler och hur vi resonerar och accepterar det. *Då* kan kunden vara i fokus, om kunden har andra åsikter, då krockar det naturligtvis...

¹⁰⁵ David: Vi jagar ju pinnar som idioter här nu, så vi har ju tappat uppdraget med att vi ska driva in pengar på ett rättssäkert och kvalitativt sätt så att våra utmätningar håller i tingsrätten och att vi ska fatta pålitliga offensiva beslut. Det gör vi ju inte längre.

Daniel: Well... If you are supposed to be customer oriented and the customer should be in focus... Then you can be damn sure [Daniel's emphasis] that the customer on the other side won't be satisfied with our management of the case.¹⁰⁶

The demands of customer orientation are, from a frontline point of view, sometimes also experienced as incompatible with the demands to strictly follow internal procedures. This was for instance indicated when I talked to enforcement officer Sofia. She explained that she sometimes considers it difficult to act customer oriented, as she feels as if she is being hold back by internal regulations at times when she should be able to provide the clients with service:

Sofia: At times when you want to provide service, as [when the delays were at its worst at the accounting department], when people don't get their money, then management requires that we don't say anything, instead, we should just be kind and follow the rules of procedures... So, I don't feel like I am providing any services when I just sit there babbling and apologizing and such things...¹⁰⁷

In the previous chapter, I labelled a set of guiding rules detectable in the SEA's internal communication as a principle of brand orientation. With this principle, I included a narrative of an on-going and/or future change of the organization – From a harsh and rigid organization to a more customer oriented and adaptable organization. This narrative often seems to conflict with the work reality as the enforcement officers perceive it. Harry for instance, an enforcement officer who, as seen above, understands the customer orientation of the SEA as merely one element of a more comprehensive change of the authority. He also indicated that he considers this “change-narrative” as more disturbing than helpful (unlike some of his colleagues, for instance Marta, who expressed a belief that the customer oriented brand-change of the organization would come to facilitate her job). Harry seemed to think that this narrative

¹⁰⁶ Daniel: Nja... om man ska vara kundorienterad och kunden ska vara i fokus... då kan man ge sig fan på att kunden på andra sidan inte kommer att vara så nöjd med vår hantering av ärendet.

¹⁰⁷ Sofia: När man vill ge service, till exempel [när förseningarna var som värst vid medelshanteringen], när folk inte har fått sina pengar, då kräver ju också ledningen att vi inte ska säga någonting utan att vi ska bara vara vänliga och följa arbetsreglerna... Men där känner jag det verkliga som att jag inte ger service när jag sitter och babblar runt och ber om ursäkt och har mig...

continuously is repeated because management is embarrassed of the organization's coercive aspects. Rather upset at this thought, he exclaimed: "Are we supposed to play that [the coercive aspects] down? Are we supposed to be ashamed of it?" Whereupon he scornfully stated: "We are an enforcement authority, not a debt-relieving authority". Robert, an enforcement officer working in a SEA office in a medium-sized city, also told me that he had thought immensely about how the organization presents itself and how it strives to be perceived. Relatively instantly in my interview with him, it was obvious that he also felt aversion towards the idea of changing the brand of the organization. This attempt, as he described it, "to clean the façade", he considered to be "ridiculous", as it from his point of view was a change that was not at all reflecting reality:

Robert: I sometimes say that they [management] run around playing bank. That our mission is supposed to become something nicer than it actually is. We evict people. We deal with poor people. And it's not very fun, it's not really nice. Of course, we should try to do it as well as possible, but all this talk about customer orientation... it's just an attempt to make it seem nicer than it really is.¹⁰⁸

Robert also told me that he considers this to be something more than a change of brand. He explained that from his point of view it seems like an "ideological transformation" that can be "tied to an ideology of viewing public activities as a part of the market". That the change-narrative sometimes, by the employees, is experienced as difficult to reconcile with their image of the organization and the environment they work in, this was also revealed in the reactions that followed an intranet article with a "throwback-theme", in which a 1988-newspaper article was presented (Intr.27/04/2018). In this newspaper article, it was described how the SEA was in an ongoing transformation. A transformation described in terms of a change of "image", and described as a "charm offensive"; The organization was supposed to move from being seen as harsh, rough, or tough to being seen as "soft". However, the comments posted on the intranet article's comments field indicate that this description of the organization is a description that many employees¹⁰⁹ cannot recognise.

¹⁰⁸ Robert: Jag brukar säga att man springer runt och leker bank. Att vårt uppdrag ska bli något finare än vad det egentligen är. Vi vråker folk. Vi har att göra med fattiga människor. Och det är inte jättekul, det är inte jättetrevligt. Givetvis ska vi göra det så bra som möjligt men allt det här snacket om kundorientering... det är bara ett försök att göra det lite finare än vad det egentligen är.

¹⁰⁹ It is unknown whether these commentators are enforcement officers or on what organizational level they work at, consequently I label them as "employees".

Instead, the commentators articulate that they see the authority as an enforcer of laws and administrator of justice, exemplified by the following comment:

The SEA is neither a harsh nor soft authority. We are a law enforcing authority and we treat our citizens in a fair way. (Comment posted on the 27th of April 2018)¹¹⁰

The idea of changing the organization from a harsh or rough organization to a softer thus seems to conflict with how some of the employees think about the organization and its assignment. In their eyes, the organization cannot be given an attribute on a continuum between rough and soft. Instead, the organization is just performing its mission and the measures it must take prescribed by law. As a result, these employees struggle to understand why the organization ought to initiate a “charm offensive”. On several occasions, I have also talked to enforcement officers who interpret this change- narrative as an indication of a “corporatization” of the SEA. Among the enforcement officers, one can frequently hear comments pointing to this kind of interpretations. Comments indicating that management is transforming the organization into a bank, a private collection agency, or some other kind of private enterprise. One reason to why the officers experience this transformation as negative seems to be that they feel as if it somewhat blurs the boundary between the setting that they work in and business settings, and that this means that they more often are facing clients that request something that they cannot deliver, such as more or less unregulated instalment plans. Consequently, as if they were talking to a business organization that could “bend the rules” to satisfy the customer. Thus, it seems important for the officers to hold on to their role as *public servants* working for a *public organization* (field notes).

6.3 Additional frontline reactions to hybridity

So far in the chapter, I have presented how the enforcement officers perceive the main manifestations of the hybridity of the SEA from their frontline perspective: How they interpret the concept of customer orientation, how they relate to the notion of “customers, whether they think the organization and themselves lives up to the demands of customer orientation and how they experience working in an environment of multiple demands. It has been

¹¹⁰ Kronofogden är varken hård eller mjuk myndighet. Vi är en rättsvårdande myndighet och behandlar våra medborgare på ett rättvist sätt.

indicated that many officers struggle with the hybridity. In the following sections, I will further elaborate how the enforcement officers react to the hybridity during their daily work at the SEA's frontline.

6.3.1 The priority of legal and procedural demands

The communication of the authority is, as seen in the previous chapter, aside from customer orientation also permeated by a principle that I call a principle of legality. A principle, for instance, revealed by the repeated stress to always act in accordance with law, and the presentation of the authority as primarily being an enforcer of the law and a crime-counteracting entity. Many enforcement officers consider the demands that this principle presents to be of great importance to follow. This is for instance revealed by how the enforcement officers often refer to laws and judicial prescriptions, even when they are talking about how they, as enforcement officers of the SEA, ought to behave towards the clients. This is also evident by how many of the officers favour a legal jargon in their work communication (field notes). Several of the enforcement officers I have talked to have also explicitly stated that the law constitutes their main guidance during work. Furthermore, their identities as enforcement officers often seem to be anchored in the obligation to take measures in accordance with legally determined decisions. In other words, they consider themselves as law-enforcers rather than as service providers. It is, however, important to underscore that even though many of them express that a principle based on law and legal prescriptions is more important to follow than a recommendation to act customer oriented, it does not mean that they consider it irrelevant to treat the clients in a decent manner. It does, however, imply that they consider it to be of the highest priority to follow laws, or as enforcement officer Lars told me: "Legal requirements come first, of course this doesn't mean that you may behave unpleasantly, you must still treat people in a decent way...". In a similar way did enforcement officer Nils underscore that he, when performing his work, is obliged to act in accordance with the rule of law. Consequently, his chances of compromise are few, even if this sometimes might seem harsh:

Nils: As we are so governed by law and regulation, I would say that many assume that we [the SEA] is an *enforcement* authority. We must do what is imposed on us. There is an obligation. We must ensure that it's being carried out, regardless of if it entails that someone must pay or that someone must move.¹¹¹

Several officers that I have talked to have also uttered that the SEA often implements new terminologies or concepts, and in this fast-changing environment the law offers them something persistent to hold on to. Enforcement officer Viktor, for instance, articulated this feeling as he commented the many different concepts and strategies that he feels that the authority has applied during the time that he has been employed at the SEA:

Viktor: Things come and go all the time, and this was something that I reacted to when I started to work here. Back then, I thought that people were old and somehow unwilling to change, but now I have started to understand why (laughter)... and I have become the same.

Interviewer: You mean that they are tired of...

Viktor: Yes... but it's like fashion. Things come and go, and to have something to hold on to and have a professional identity, then law is somehow... it is the doctrine... together with directions and handbooks. It is there somewhere that I have found the base on which I have built my identity as a public servant.¹¹²

Several of the officers that I have talked to have also proclaimed that they feel that it is extremely important that all clients are treated in a legally secure way, even if this sometimes might mean a slightly more impersonal treatment. Enforcement officer David even stated that the persons he meets during his

¹¹¹ Nils: Eftersom vi är så styrda av lagar och regler, skulle jag säga att många utgår från att vi är en verkställande myndighet. Vi ska göra det som åläggs oss. Det finns en förpliktelse. Den ska vi se till att den genomförs, om det sen är så att betala eller att någon ska flytta.

¹¹² Viktor: Det kommer och går nya saker hela tiden, och det var något jag reagerade på när jag började. Då tänkte jag att folk var gamla och liksom förändringsobenägna, men nu börjar jag förstå varför (skratt)... och jag har blivit likadan.

Intervjuare: Du menar att de är trötta på...

Viktor: Ja, men det är liksom mode. Saker kommer och går och för att ha någonting att hålla fast vid och ha en yrkesidentitet så är det ju lagstiftningen på något sätt och det är doktrinen och handledningar och handböcker. Det är där någonstans som jag har hittat den grund som sen har byggt min identitet som tjänsteman.

work, in his eyes, are not “customers”. They are rather “...legal entities and we are supposed to take care of their appeals or whatever they are claiming... and then it doesn’t matter what attitude we have”.

Many enforcement officers also underscored the importance to have a focus on procedures and to always maintain a strict compliance with internal rules. This was for instance revealed when I talked to Stig, an enforcement officer who had been employed by the SEA for more than thirty years. He told me that he has always felt that the authority is pervaded by a “sort of internal bureaucracy”, meaning that “things always have to be done in accordance with the rules of procedures”. Something that he meant resulted in an equal and correct handling. I could, however, also sense an amount of frustration as he also implied that processes at the organization, as a result of the internal bureaucracy, sometimes felt slow and unnecessary rigid.

6.3.2 The jokes and dismissals

Customer orientation, and not least the notion of customers, is often subject to jokes from the officers. This joking and mocking of the customer orientation of the organization, and the concepts that come with it, surely has not escaped me, especially not since I started this research project and continuously had to tell colleagues that I was working with a project about the customer orientation of the authority. I have heard several jokes, especially on the theme that the “customer is always right” (field notes). Furthermore, when talking to the officers about the organization’s customer orientation they also sometimes reflect on the sarcasm and puns that the concept, and not least the notion of “customers”, seem to trigger among some of them. For instance, an enforcement officer mentioned that using the notion “customer” “has become a little bit of a joke”. Moreover, another officer told me that “unfortunately the concept has started to become ridiculed among the employees”. That the concepts and expressions associated with the authority’s customer orientation sometimes are ridiculed was also supported when I talked to Maria and I asked her if she ever uses the notion of customers when referring to the authority’s clients:

Maria: No, unless I'm ironic...

Interviewer: Do you mean that you joke about it?

Maria: It happens yes...but that's always between co-workers, not externally.¹¹³

Similarly, an officer once told me that the customer notion is “mocked in some fractions”, and another one commented that he only uses the term “customers” with “a sarcastic tone”. Yet another officer told me that he only says “customer” when he “wants to be a bit scornful”. Furthermore, when Martin, an enforcement officer employed since about five years, answered the question of what he and his colleagues are calling the clients, he began by first listing the usual legal terms, and then continued by saying: “...and when we are making fun of the authority we are talking about ‘customers’”.

Strikingly many enforcement officers also dismiss the market-inspired concepts of the SEA's communication, and describe them as irrelevant. In other words, they proclaim that these concepts have no impact on the organization and on their, and their colleagues', behaviour. This approach towards customer orientation was for instance implied in enforcement officer Lars's reply to my question of whether he and his colleagues live up to the demands of customer orientation:

Lars: If the authority's management would have never said anything about this 'you should be customer oriented', I think we would still be in roughly the same place in most parts. I remember when the director-general said that she thought it was great because now you would be treated nicely on the phone and not be connected to someone else. This was a mistake from the perspective that you had the idea that the case officers used to be unpleasant and connected the calls to someone else all the time, but that has not been the case. I don't think there has been any major changes just because they say we should be customer oriented.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Maria: Nej, om jag inte ska ironisera...

Intervjuare: Du menar att du skämtar om det?

Maria: Det förekommer ja...men då är det ju mellan kollegor, aldrig utåt.

¹¹⁴ Lars: Hade myndighetsledningen aldrig sagt något om det här med att 'ni bör vara kundorienterade' så tror jag att vi ändå hade varit på ungefär samma ställe i de flesta delarna. Jag kommer ihåg när Rikskronofogden sa att hon tyckte att det var jättebra för nu

I have also, when discussing the topic of this study, several times been told that the customer orientation of the authority is irrelevant, or that it has little or no effect at all. In several of my field notes, I have written reflections about how colleagues have rejected the topic of the study as “trivial”, “pointless”, “meaningless” or as a “non-issue” (field notes). Sometimes the market-inspired terminology of the SEA by the officers is dismissed as “empty phrases”. When I, for instance, asked Maria, the enforcement officer who told me that she only uses the notion of customer when she is ironic, what she believed that the authority means when it is stated that the organization strive to become “customer driven”, she burst out in laughter and stated: “Honestly... I think it’s just empty phrases!” Likewise, experienced officer Stig replied to the same question by asserting: “It’s on the verge of being empty phrases... almost so... I don’t quite understand what they mean with it”. Moreover, enforcement officer Mats claimed that as soon as concepts and phrases such as “customer focus” occur at a team meeting “at least 50 percent of the people in the room roll their eyes”, which he interprets as they consider this talk “nonsense”.

In a similar manner, some market-inspired notions that the authority often apply are sometimes dismissed by the officers as just a part of a trend. For instance, one enforcement officers told me that “it’s just fashion” when we spoke about the customer notion and another officer told me, when asked why she believes that the authority has chosen to use the notion of customers when referring to its clients, that it probably is because that “it is supposed to feel more modern”. Also, I have been told that “customers” is just one “buzzword” among many other adopted concepts by the authority. Viktor elaborated this interpretation by stating that it is a part of “new public management”, and continued by saying that the SEA has been way too naive and quick when following different trends:

Viktor: It is fashion... fashion in concepts and yes ...such things as in everything else... It is the same as designing offices: ‘open landscapes’ and such things. And it is easy to just become negative, but unfortunately many of these things, such as the customer notion, open landscapes, activity-based

skulle man bli trevligt bemött i telefon och inte bli kopplad runt, och det var ett misstag utifrån det perspektivet att man hade uppfattningen att handläggarna brukade vara otrevliga och kopplade runt och så, men så har det inte varit. Jag tror inte det har blivit någon större ändring bara för att de säger.

offices – They are almost... It is almost as one just mimics without ever thinking ‘is this suitable for a public authority?’¹¹⁵

“New public management” also came up when I discussed the authority’s customer orientation with Martin, and he concluded sighing: “...in 15 years it will be something else...”. Some officers also seem to dismiss customer orientation as “a nice thought” and being “far from reality”. Alternatively, they are considered to be targeting someone else. For instance, employees working at another department or employees who are handling other operations, which was indicated by enforcement officer Stina when I asked her about her thoughts about the authority’s customer orientation:

Stina: Well...I read somewhere last year that we are supposed to be more customer focused and customer oriented and try to reach out at different fairs and such things, but I don’t work with that. I work at a totally different level...¹¹⁶

6.3.3 The feeling of a growing organizational gap

Several enforcement officers that I have talked to have indicated that they feel as if there is a distance between themselves (i.e., the enforcement officers, and/or the frontline of the organization) and management. Several enforcement officers have also told me that they feel that management’s communication has changed. Rather than being a two-way communication it has started to become more and more like commands imposed on them. Enforcement officers Lars, for instance, told me that he feels as if management’s communication more and more is like coming from “an ayatollah” (indicating that the communication is “preached”, not a dialogue). It seems as if the frequent use of market-inspired concepts and terminologies in the internal communication, at least to some extent, lies behind this feeling. Enforcement officer Viktor claimed that the frequent use of market-inspired concepts in the

¹¹⁵ Viktor: Det är mode... mode i begrepp och ja... i sådana saker som i allt annat... Det är samma som utformning av kontor, ‘öppna landskap’ och sådana saker. Och det är lätt att det bara blir negativt, men tyvärr så är det mycket av de sakerna som just kundbegreppet, öppna landskap, aktivitetsbaserade kontor – De är nästan... Det är nästan som att man bara apar efter utan att reflektera ‘är det här lämpligt för en offentlig myndighet?’

¹¹⁶ Stina: Ja... jag läste någonstans förra året att vi ska vara mer kundinriktade och kundorienterade och försöka nå ut på olika mässor och sådant, men det där jobbar ju inte jag med. Jag jobbar ju på en helt annan nivå...

communication has reduced his and his co-worker's confidence in management, as they, according to him, just could not fully understand why it was used to such a big extent. As a consequence, this has created a gap between management and the enforcement officers, which Viktor believed grows as more top-level employees are recruited externally. Experienced enforcement officer Stig agreed on this when he asserted that those working within the enforcement procedure, more and more, have started to feel as if the authority's top management do not really understand the enforcement officers' reality. According to Stig, this risks having negative consequences for the whole organization. Several of the enforcement officers that I have talked to also seem to believe that when you have worked for a while within the enforcement procedure, then you have learned what the clients want and how they behave, which is a knowledge that they seem to think that the management employees (especially the ones recruited externally) are missing. Enforcement officer Anton, for instance, told me that having practical experience of the profession: "...changes your understanding of when it actually is possible to provide great service".

Several enforcement officers that I talked to also indicated that they believe that the lack of practical knowledge is a reason why managers and top-level employees tend to embrace market-inspired terms and concepts while they (the officers) and their frontline colleagues more often struggle with these terms and concepts. Many enforcement officers also imply that referring to the clients as customers is something that is suiting those employed at another (higher) level – managers that do not know how the work reality is for the enforcement officers. For instance, enforcement officer Nils said that the notion of customers is "...something that management wants to use so that it looks good in reports and such things, but it's so far from reality and what we do". Experienced enforcement officer Maria also underscored that she feels as if management nowadays lack the understanding of how things function in practice:

Maria: Sometimes one wonders whether they understand the difference between working with collection versus what they do, counting statistics and such cute things. I believe... Well, I know that it has become an enormous gap between the main office and the enforcement procedure. It's like a completely different world today.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Maria: Ibland funderar man på om de förstår skillnaden med att arbeta med indrivning kontra det de sitter och räknar, statistikpinnar och sådant där sött. Nog tror jag... eller jag

Maria also, like several of her colleagues, gave voice to a feeling that there is a gap growing between management and the street-level of the organization, which she believed eventually will result in increased problems for the authority. Moreover, she proclaimed that if the employees at management level continues to, as she sees it, “focus on the wrong things” there will be more public complaints: “...suddenly they are overwhelmed by complains to The Parliamentary Ombudsmen (JO). So, they are focusing on wrong things. It’s because of a lack of knowledge, they don’t know what the authority does on a daily basis”. In a similar manner, enforcement officer Ingrid stated that the ones working at the management level apply market-inspired terms such as the notion of customers more easily. When I asked her why she replied: “Because they don’t see it daily...they don’t have that pressure on them, because it’s us that are out there meeting people in crisis, people that are mentally ill...”. John and Nora were two other enforcement officers who also suggested that the management’s embracement of market-inspired concepts is due to the employees’ lack of practical experience and external background:

John: I think that the current management... They don’t have a very good grasp of how the operations work at officer’s level because so many have been replaced and they come from outside the business... so I guess the customer notion is easier when you are from that sector perhaps.¹¹⁸

Nora: Many of our current executives come from outside, perhaps from the private sector. There, you have a totally different customer... So, I don’t think that we understand each other completely.¹¹⁹

Enforcement officer Harry also linked an increased practical inexperience among the management employees to an increased mistrust towards management. He claimed that many of his colleagues were annoyed as they felt that many managers do not seem to understand what it means to be a public servant: “It creates a lot of irritation among the employees when they see that the managers don’t understand the activities, don’t understand what takes time,

vet ju att det blivit ett enormt glapp mellan huvudkontoret och verkställigheten. Det är som det är en helt annan värld idag.

¹¹⁸ John: Jag tror att ledningen som vi har nu... De har inte jättebra koll på hur verksamheten fungerar på inspektörsnivå eftersom man bytt ut stora delar och att de kommer utifrån... Så att kundbegreppet är väl lättare om man kommer från den branschen kanske.

¹¹⁹ Nora: Många av våra högre chefer nu kommer utifrån, kanske ifrån privata sektorn. Där har du en helt annan kund... Så jag tror inte vi förstår varandra helt och hållet.

only see to statistics, don't see everything else that is done but isn't measured". Enforcement officer Sofia also told me that "the customer perspective" has reduced her confidence in management and that nowadays "communication from management is taken with a pinch of salt".

6.4 Discussion

In this chapter the focus has been set on the frontline-level of the SEA, and I have presented the hybridity of the SEA from the perspective of the enforcement officers. I began by presenting how the enforcement officers understand the customer orientation of the SEA. The customer orientation of the SEA evokes business associations among many officers, and many say that they believe that the customer orientation of the authority is supposed to signal that the clients ought to be treated in a certain way, in a "customer-like" manner. Moreover, a frequent interpretation of the customer orientation of the organization among the enforcement officers is that it is an urge to adapt to the clients, especially when it comes to communication (i.e., to use a comprehensible language). Many enforcement officers also believe that the customer orientation of the SEA is merely one element of a bigger transformation of the authority, a transformation with the intention of making the organization more market-like and business inspired.

I then presented what the enforcement officers think about the most prominent manifestations of the customer orientation of the SEA: the re-characterization of the clients into "customers". The SEA's use of the notion of "customers" has not escaped the enforcement officers and the issue of naming the clients is an issue that arouses many thoughts and feelings among them. The enforcement officers often evaluate the notion by its suitability in their daily work, many of them find the notion of customers vague and unsuitable and prefer to use terms that define what role the client has in relation to the authority (i.e., they prefer to talk about the clients in terms of "debtors", "creditors" etc.).

As seen in Chapter 5 the SEA, in its internal communication, tries to redefine to notion of "customers" and underscores that its customers should not be viewed as the always active and rational character of the commercial sector. However, many enforcement officers have not embraced the authority's characterization of its "customers" as they associate the notion with a business relationship, which is revealed by how they often link the customer concept to a business context, or refer to a customer as a character in a voluntary

relationship with an organization, a character with many options etc. In other words, the conventional idea of the customers (as presented by e.g. du Gay & Salaman 1992) seems to be so firmly rooted among many of the officers that the message from the authority, that the customers of the SEA should not be viewed from that perspective, does not seem to have any influence on how they relate to the notion. However, it is also important to acknowledge that there are a few officers who apply the notion during work and have no difficulties to rationalize the authority's use of the notion.

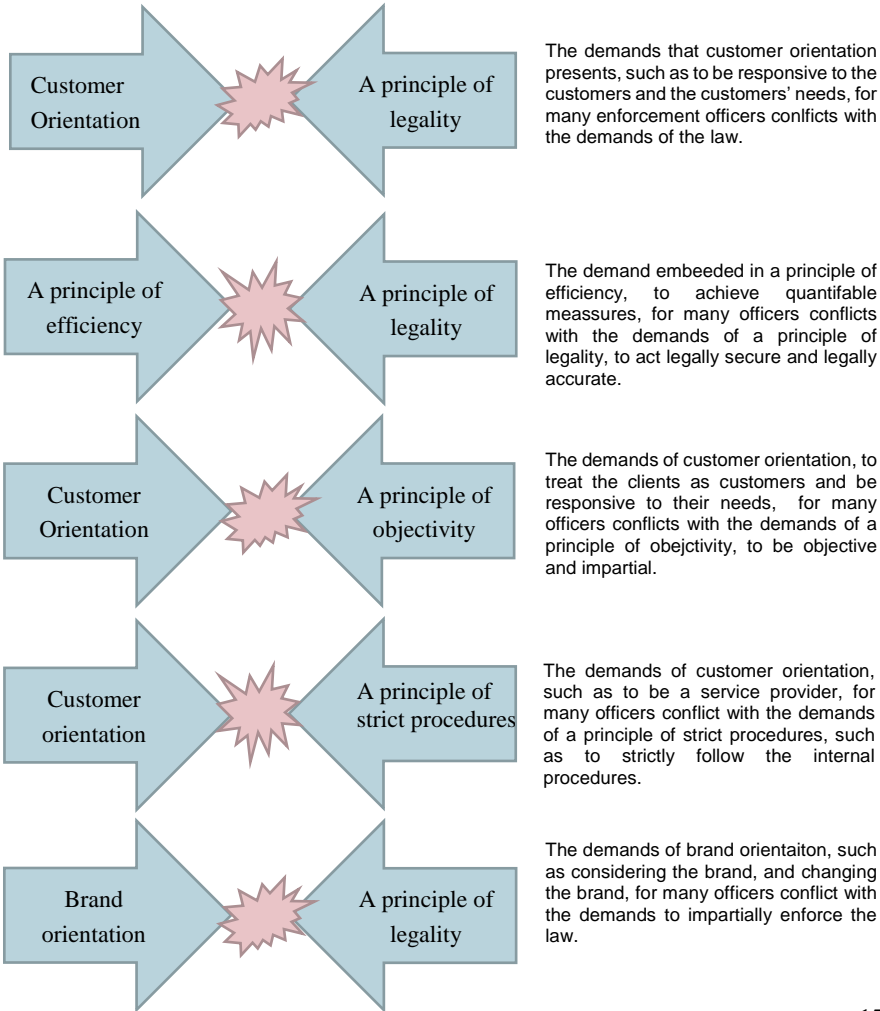
I then went on by presenting how the officers think about the concept of customer orientation, and whether they feel that the SEA and themselves may live up to the demands of customer orientation. Among the enforcement officers there seems to be a widespread feeling that customer orientation is not the organization's highest priority. Instead, they feel as if economy and efficiency have the highest priority. For their own sake, many of them say that they try to live up to the demands of customer orientation, but also underscore that the demands of customer orientation is difficult to live up to in the environment they work. There are also enforcement officers who just cannot understand the concept in this setting, and they immediately dismiss the concept. However, there are also a few who cannot see any difficulties with matching the demands of customer orientation with their work reality.

As presented in Chapter 3 Sturdy (1998) has, in a literature review, identified three main responses to customer orientation among employees: behavioural compliance (accepted only on the surface), ambivalence (accepted to some extent), and in cases where the employees are firmly anchored in occupational norms: resistance. On the basis of Sturdy's categorization the enforcement officers can be categorized as responding with either ambivalence (officers feeling that the customer notion is difficult to apply on the persons they meet during their work, and perceiving that the demands of customer orientation are difficult to live up to, although they try), resistance (officers feeling that the customer notion is not at all applicable on the persons they meet during work and perceiving the demands of customer orientation as impossible to live up to in the public setting), or compliance (officers applying the notion of customers during work and having no difficulties embracing the concept). The last type of response mainly seems to be linked to officers who rationalize and form the concept so that it fits their own work reality rather than linking the concept to a market setting.

In this chapter I have also presented how the officers experience working in an organization that is communicating multiple demands on how they should act and behave. Many officers perceive conflicts between the demands embedded in the principles permeating the organization. For instance, many

enforcement offices perceive that the demands to act legally correct sometimes prevent them to be responsive to the customers' needs. Moreover, they sense several other conflicts of demands, like for instance that the demands of efficiency conflicts with legal demands and that the demands of customer orientation conflicts with the demand to be objective. In the discussion of Chapter 5 I presented the different principles of the SEA in Table 5.2. In Figure 6.1 (below) I have summarized how the different principles, and their underlying demands, for many officers conflict.

Figure 6.1 The conflicts of demands embedded in the guiding principles as perceived from a frontline perspective



In the second part of the chapter I further explored ways in which the officers react to working in an environment of multiple pressures of hybridity. The officers first of all seem to prioritize the legal demands. The jokes and sarcasm directed towards, primarily, the customer orientation, but also the dismissing of, for instance, customer orientation, and the declaring that it just is an empty phrase, might also be thought of as reactions to the multiple demands of the hybrid setting. What also might be interpreted as a reaction to the hybridity is the feeling among many officers that a gap is widening between the frontline and management level.

7 An analysis of the hybridity of the SEA

In this chapter I will present my analysis of the hybridity of the SEA. The analysis has been performed with the help of the institutional logics perspective.

7.1 The institutional complexity of the SEA

According to the institutional logics perspective, organizations are not at all times permeated by one single culture presenting a coherent set of demands to the organizations and their employees. Instead, organizations may be permeated by multiple “institutional logics”, presenting a multiplicity of different demands that might even be experienced as conflicting or competing. In the case of the latter, organizations are, with the terminology of the institutional logics perspective, in a state of *institutional complexity* (Smets, Morris & Greenwood 2012: 892). Scholars often claim that organizations that have adopted one or several element(s) normally associated with organizations outside their own sector might end up in a state of institutional complexity (e.g., Pache & Santos 2013: 972-973; Nordstrand Berg & Pinheiro 2016: 147). Hence, when public organizations adopt market-inspired elements (such as customer orientation), this might lead to market logic(s) being brought into organizations previously only guided by a more traditional public-sector logic (i.e., a logic with intrinsic legalistic and bureaucratic demands) (Reissner 2019: 48-49).

When I have analysed the hybridity of the SEA, I have interpreted the different principles that permeate the organization (as presented in Chapter 5, and summarized in Table 5.2) as the content of two different institutional logics. Figure 7.1 illustrates my procedure when capturing the logics of the SEA. Initially I have identified a number of different demands on how to act and behave, in the communication of the SEA (1st order coding). Secondly, I

have categorized these different demands into six different themes (In Chapter 5 presented as the leading principles of the SEA). Finally, I have categorized the themes of the 2nd order coding into two final themes based on how they are governed by common value systems.

Figure 7.1 The procedure of capturing the institutional logics of the SEA

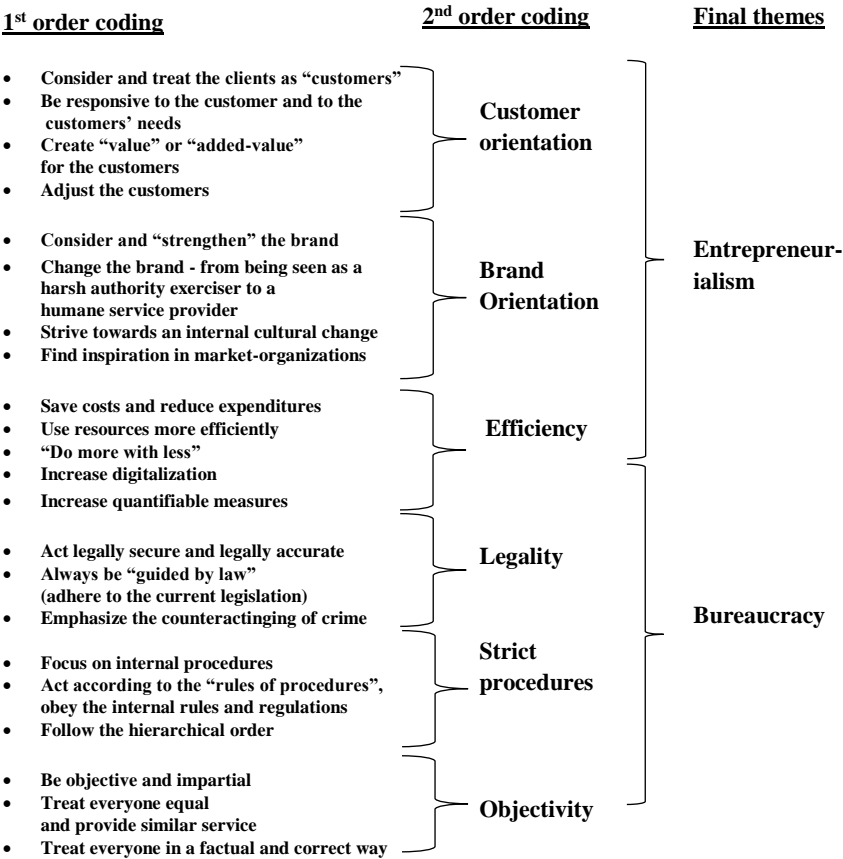


Table 7.1 (on p. 178) demonstrates the logics; how the different principles and their underlying demands, may be positioned within the framework of two different institutional orders: entrepreneurialism and bureaucracy. Hence, these orders are the governing frames (Thornton, Ocasio & Lounsbury 2012: 54), or value systems that influence the content of the logics. The content of

the logics is then the different principles and the demands that these principles present to the organization and to the employees.

Accordingly, I have named the two logics that I have detected “the entrepreneurial logic” and “the bureaucratic logic”. The entrepreneurial logic is built on three pillars: 1) the customer orientation and the demands treat the clients as customers, and be responsive to the customers’ needs, 2) the brand orientation and the demands to consider the brand and try to change the brand, and 3) the pursuit of efficiency and the demands to save costs and reduce expenditures. Market logics have frequently been described in earlier research (in, for instance, Nordstrand Berg & Pinheiro 2016; Dahlmann & Grosvold 2017; Thornton 2002; Wei 2017). The entrepreneurial logic that I describe here can also be characterized as a market logic; but I more specifically choose to describe it as *entrepreneurial* as it is imbued by an “entrepreneurial spirit” (as it is advocated by Osborne & Gaebler 1992) and permeated by the ideas associated with the entrepreneurial way of managing public organizations (see Chapter 3). The entrepreneurial logic brings market demands, in which the demand to act in accordance with the concept of customer orientation is a vital element. In other words, the entrepreneurial logic is the logic that follows the hybridization of the SEA.

It might be argued that the third pillar of the entrepreneurial logic, the element of efficiency, also could be linked to bureaucratic values. But I argue that this is an *efficiency* strive focused on reducing costs, and the ratio between input and output, instead of the more bureaucratic strive for *effectiveness* that imply a focus on what outcomes that results from the inputs. As a result, the strive for efficiency is included in the entrepreneurial logic (see Lundquist 1997; Pollit & Bouckaert 2011 and Karlsson 2014 and their claims that demands of efficiency and economy has replaced demands of effectiveness and equity due to the NPM-reform).

The second logic that I have detected, the bureaucratic logic, is also built on three pillars: 1) the maintenance of legality and the demands of legal security and the rule of law, 2) the focus on internal procedures and the demands to strictly obey the rules of procedures, and 3) the objectivity and the demands to always act impartial and treat all equally. Hence, this logic is built on pillars permeated by the values of bureaucracy and may be linked to the bureaucratic mode of managing public organizations (see Chapter 3). In other words it is the logic that assumingly singlehandedly have permeated the SEA before the hybridization, i.e., it is linked to values that may be described as traditional in public administration. Logics of bureaucracy have several times been presented in earlier research (e.g. Bévort & Suddaby 2016; Binder 2007; Meyer et al 2014), and just as in earlier research the bureaucratic logic that I

present here is a logic of a legal rationality, formalized frameworks and objective treatment.

Table 7.1 The prevailing institutional logics of the SEA
“The entrepreneurial logic”

Entrepreneurialism	
Customer orientation	Consider and treat the clients as “customers” Be responsive to the customers and to the customers’ needs Create “value” or “added-value” for the customers Adjust the customers
Brand orientation	Consider and “strengthen” the brand Change the brand - from being seen as a harsh authority exerciser to a humane service provider Strive towards an internal cultural change Find inspiration in market-organizations
A principle of efficiency	Save costs and reduce expenditures Use resources more efficiently “Do more with less” Increase digitalization Increase quantifiable measures

“The bureaucratic logic”

Bureaucracy	
Principles	Demands
A principle of legality	Act legally secure and legally accurate Always be “guided by law” (adhere to the current legislation) Emphasize the counteracting of criminality
A principle of strict procedures	Focus on internal procedures Act according to the “rules of procedures”, obey the internal rules and regulations Follow the hierarchical order
A principle of objectivity	Be objective and impartial Treat everyone equal and provide similar service Treat everyone in a factual and correct way

Table 7.2 brings out the competing aspects of the two logics. Hence, the table is highlighting the fact that the logics in some aspects is contradictory. The entrepreneurial logic suggests that the organization’s primary focus should be the customers and their needs, instead the bureaucratic logic indicates that the

primary focus should be set on laws and internal rules of procedures. The entrepreneurial logic advises an orientation towards the customers, whereas the bureaucratic logic signals a more internal orientation – an orientation towards the internal procedures. Furthermore, the logics differ in regard to the organizational “self-presentation”, i.e., how the organization should be recognized and “branded”: the entrepreneurial logic signals that the organization should be thought of as a service provider, while the bureaucratic logic indicates that the organization, first of all, should be seen as an administrator of justice (or as a crime-fighter and an enforcer of law). Moreover, the logics compete in regard to what should be measured. The entrepreneurial logic suggests that the organization should be measured based on its success in customer satisfaction and efficiency, while the bureaucratic logic brings out legal accuracy and process quality as the most important aspects when assessing the authority. Accordingly, I argue that the SEA is an organization permeated by two different, and to some extent competing, logics and consequently in a state of *institutional complexity* (Smets, Morris & Greenwood 2012: 892).

Table 7.2: The competing aspects of the prevailing logics of the SEA

	<u>The entrepreneurial logic</u>	<u>The bureaucratic logic</u>
Primary Focus	The customers and their needs	Laws and internal procedures
Organizational orientation	Customer oriented (externally)	Focused on procedures (internally)
Organizational self-presentation	The authority as a service provider	The authority as an administrator of justice
Main Organizational benchmark	Customer satisfaction and efficiency	Legal certainty and process quality

7.1.1 How the organization reacts to the institutional complexity

How does the SEA react to the institutional complexity? In other words, how is the coexistence of the two, in some aspects competing, logics managed by the organization? To answer this question, I have scrutinized the internal communication of the SEA from the institutional logics perspective to see how the logics appear in the communication.

It may be established that the entrepreneurial logic is leading the communication presented on the organization's intranet, while the logics are more equally represented in the organization's strategy directions. Appendix II is offering an overview of my analysis of the SEA's strategy directions from the institutional logics perspective. The appendix visualizes how the different documents most often are dominated by one specific logic, while the logics also, in a few documents, are equally (or at least more or less equally) represented. It is noticeable that the topic that the document is treating, is controlling which logic that is the most prominent in the document. The bureaucratic logic with its focus on legal issues and rules of procedures, is the logic that the SEA chooses to emphasize when the topic is close to practice. As example the instructions on how the employees should act in certain situations during their work, such as the Code of conduct (SEA 2014d) and the Instruction for reception- and visiting routines (SEA 2015c), are documents permeated with by the bureaucratic logic. The bureaucratic logic is also highlighted in safety instructions and instructions on how to handle threats, such as the Guideline for the handling of unauthorized influence (SEA 2014b), the Instruction for how to handle suicide threats and deaths (SEA 2014e), and the Safety guideline for the employees of the SEA (SEA 2018e). In other words, the bureaucratic logic is foremost used for topics that are requiring a rather factual and formal treatment. The entrepreneurial logic and its demands for customer focus and brand orientation, is more or less absent in those kinds of documents. Instead, the entrepreneurial logic is prominent in relation to topics such as communication and internal and external relations, for instance in the Communication strategy (SEA 2017b) and the Guideline for internal communication (SEA 2016a) and the Policy for the SEA's brand (SEA 2016c), and in strategic approaches with a general character, such as the Strategy for enforcement (SEA 2013a) and the Strategy for summary procedure (SEA 2013e). Whereas the bureaucratic logic is quite absent in documents treating topics such as these.

How the SEA manages the institutional complexity, can be described as a procedure of *emphasising/downplaying*; the organization *emphasizes* the logics in contexts and topics in which they are found suitable (to highlight and

bring out demands and concepts associated with that logic), and/or *downplays* them in contexts and topics in where they are considered as improper (i.e. deemphasize, or perhaps even ignore demands and concepts associated with that logic). Accordingly, how the SEA is managing the institutional complexity can be linked to studies that indicate a *loose coupling* of logics, where organizations may separate institutional logics (e.g., Baker 2013; Binder 2007; Goodrick & Reay 2011), as the SEA separates the logics and let them guide different aspects of the organization's activities, thereby avoiding conflicts between the logics.

The SEA's management of institutional complexity can also be linked to Meyer and Rowan's (1977) advice to organizations to *decouple* organizational aspects derived from external pressures from internal operational practices. The SEA is decoupling the elements of the entrepreneurial logic from topics close to practice, whereas the bureaucratic logic is decoupled from formal policies on the general strategic approaches and how the organization should be experienced internally and externally. Thereby the SEA is able to maintain an external and internal image of being a customer-oriented service provider, i.e., a hybrid public organization, while not having to confront the competing aspects of the entrepreneurial logic in relation to topics that are of a more operational nature. The entrepreneurial logic may also be considered as a logic that has evolved because of external pressures (due to NPM-reforms and demands to become more "entrepreneurial" and less "bureaucratic"), and the organization may thus be said to decouple the logic derived from external pressures from the internal practice.

When relating the SEA's way of managing institutional complexity to Skelcher and Smith's (2015) model of different types of hybrid organizations (see Table 4.2) the SEA can be characterized as a "segmented hybrid" as the organization is sorting different logics between "functions".

7.1.2 How the individuals at the frontline react to the institutional complexity

It is not only the organization that must learn how to manage the competing logics. The employees are also forced to somehow navigate between and along with the different logics that each entails a different set of demands on how they should behave and act during work. The institutional logics perspective asserts that the leading logics of an institution influence actors' social- or professional identities (Thornton 2012: 85-87; Skelcher & Smith 2015: 445). Accordingly, a way to analyse how employees react to an environment of institutional complexity is to analyse the employees from the point of view of

professional identities. Do they grab one logic and form their professional identities based on that specific logic (Reay & Hinnings 2009) or, do they mix the different elements of the prevailing logics into a new blended, or “hybrid” professional identity (Meyer et al. 2013; Buffat 2014)?

7.1.2.1 *The professional identity of legalistic-bureaucracy*

When examining the answers provided by the enforcement officers in the interviews, I have captured two professional identities. I have named the most common one “the professional identity of legalistic-bureaucracy”. This is a professional identity that is corresponding with the bureaucratic logic. The officers who adhere to this identity are focused on the law, they are also focusing on the internal rules of procedures and they are underscoring the importance of an objective and impartial treatment. This identity is *legalistic-bureaucratic* as it has a clear inclination towards the legal elements of the bureaucratic logic. The identity’s main manifestations are summed up in the square below:

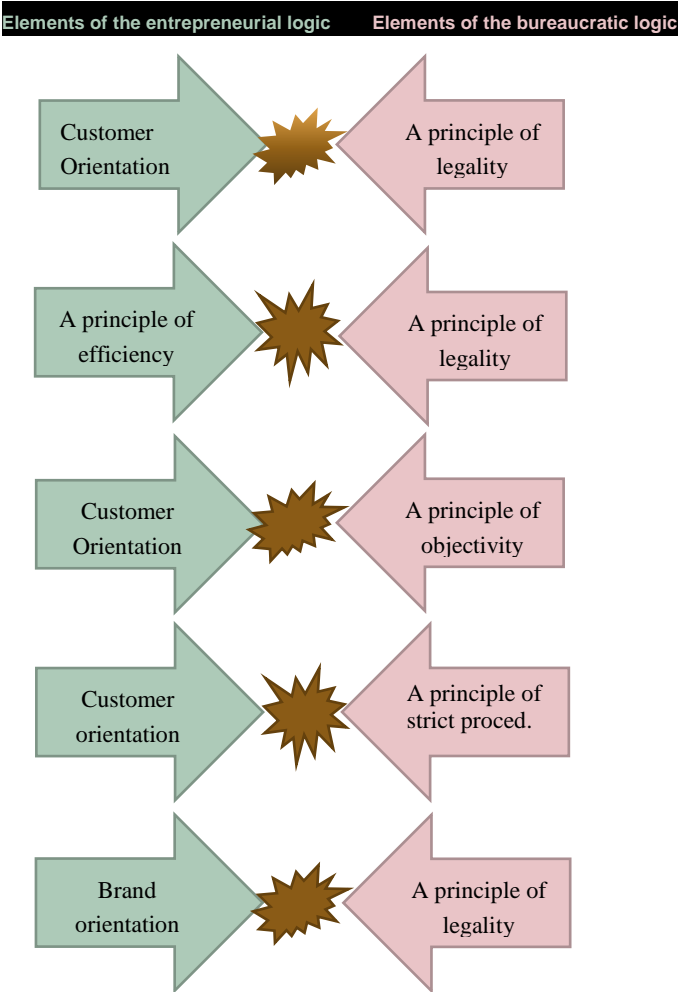
The professional identity of legalistic-bureaucracy is manifested by how these officers are:

- Referring to the law when considering how to act as enforcement officers
- Emphasizing their obligation to *enforce law*, and to be administrators of justice
- Frequently underscoring the importance of always acting correctly, and according to internal rules of procedures
- Emphasizing the importance of always acting objectively and impartially

This identity also manifests in a hesitation, and sometimes even reluctance, towards market-related demands, as these officers perceive a conflict between market-related demands and their own view on their work assignments. In other words, they perceive that the demands presented by the entrepreneurial logic are difficult to manage and hard to reconcile with “reality” (the reality as they experience it). They are also the ones who experience that the demands of the different principles of the organizations sometimes conflict. In Figure 7.1 I illustrate how the “conflicts of demands” presented in Chapter 6 (Figure 6.1) also may be presented as clashes between the two prevailing logics.

The officers who adhere to the professional identity of legalistic-bureaucracy are also the ones ignoring and dismissing the market-inspired terms and concepts. They are also the ones joking about the market-inspired elements. This may be interpreted as acts of resistance directed towards the entrepreneurial logic and its market-related demands. Moreover, they are the ones experiencing that the management-level and the official communication of the organization (that are entrenched in the entrepreneurial logic) somehow has lost its touch with reality, and they sense that a gap is widening between them (the frontline of the organization) and the management-level.

Table 7.3. The conflicting demands presented as clashes between elements of the different logics



7.1.2.2 *The hybrid-bureaucratic professional identity*

The second professional identity that I have captured among the enforcement officers is a professional identity that I named “the professional identity of hybrid-bureaucracy”. This identity is much less common in comparison to the identity described above. I consider this second identity, as indicated by the name, to be a hybrid-oriented identity. It is an identity mainly anchored in bureaucratic values, but it also includes entrepreneurial elements that are adapted to the context and coupled with bureaucratic values. This identity may, consequently, be interpreted as a result of how some enforcement officers manage to adapt the content of the entrepreneurial logic so that so that their identity as enforcement officers may be built on elements of both leading logics of the organization. The main manifestations of the hybrid-bureaucratic professional identity are summed up in the square below:

The hybrid-bureaucratic professional identity is manifested by how these individuals are:

- Still holding firmly on to values of bureaucracy
- Forming and adjusting the demands of the entrepreneurial logic to the public setting and recognizing these demands as advantageous for the organization as well as important for their work
- Considering themselves as *service-providers*, although, importantly, still firmly within the boundaries of the law, and acknowledging that cultural changes are necessary (towards a culture guided by a more entrepreneurial rationality)

The officers that have their professional identities formed by the hybrid framework, acknowledge the market-inspired concepts and language that the SEA apply as either being important for the organization and/or being supportive tools when performing their work (or, at least, as not conflicting with their work assignments).

In summary, most enforcement officers hold on to a professional identity that is firmly anchored to one of the prevailing logics, the bureaucratic logic, the logic that is linked to the traditional values of the public setting (and to the roles of public servants). But there also are a few individuals who have adopted a hybrid professional identity that, even though leaning towards the bureaucratic logic, is a hybridization of the bureaucratic logic and the entrepreneurial logic.

In terms of the professional identities the findings are similar to the results presented by Dahlmann and Grossvold (2017), who found that some of the

individuals they studied reacted to institutional complexity by “pursuing a strategy of status quo” (thus holding on to the original logic), while others blended the logics. The results may also be linked to Meyer et al.’s (2014) study, in which they demonstrate how civil servants continue to have professional identities anchored in bureaucratic ideals (i.e., the traditional ideals of public administration), while they also add new managerial ideas to their professional identities, resulting in a hybrid identity. Similar results have also been reported by Nordstrand Berg and Pinheiro (2016) when they conclude that professionals that are infused with new logics not necessarily are leaving previous logics behind, but rather are further developing them in hybridization. This is also consistent with Rao, Monin and Duran’s (2003) study in which it is shown that individuals may chose not to fully adopt a new logic, and instead partially hang on to an old logic. The enforcement officers embracing the hybrid identity may also be considered to be better at making use of the whole repertoire of the leading logics of the organization, i.e., to consider the elements of the logics as tool-kits to handle they day-to-day work, which may be compared with the results of McPherson and Sauder (2013).

7.1.3 The interplay between the organizational and individual level

I have determined, using the institutional logics perspective, that the SEA is in a state of institutional complexity with two, to some extent competing, logics guiding the organization. Organizational hybridity has mostly been studied on either organizational or individual level, whereas in this study I have examined both levels within the same organization. On an organizational level the SEA reacts to the institutional complexity by a procedure that I have described as emphasizing/downplaying - depending on topic and context one logic is emphasized (and consequently, the other one is downplayed). If talking in terms of an organizational identity of the SEA (Reissner 2019: 59), one could talk about an official account of a hybrid organizational identity, an identity stating that the organization effortlessly balances between the logics of the market and the logics of the public setting.

However, many of the individuals working in the frontline of the SEA, i.e., enforcement officers, often grapple with the institutional complexity caused by the hybridity, not only with the different pressures caused by the hybridity, but also with the question of how to view the organization in which they work. Although being held back by some institutional constraints in the form of the logics permeating the organization, the enforcement officers have some degree of agency, as they form their professional identities based on experiences of

their work and their work environment (Reissner 2019; Bévort & Suddaby 2016). As indicated above, most enforcement officers adhere to a professional identity that is firmly anchored in the bureaucratic logic, and as a result they have difficulties coping with the elements of the entrepreneurial logic, and they struggle with the institutional complexity. But those few officers that have embraced a hybrid professional identity, an identity which incorporates the entrepreneurial demands with bureaucratic values, are helped by it to navigate the institutional complexity.

Could this be the start of a change in professional identities among the frontline employees of the SEA, a change implying that the previous dominant bureaucratic identity is replaced by a new hybrid identity? A slow change in attitude that starts in hybridization among some of the workforce? One thing that contradicts this potential start of a slow change is that the former director-general stated that the customer concept had been implemented in the beginning of the 21st century, and ideas about transforming the authority by making it “softer” seem to have existed already in the late 1980’s. Accordingly, the hybridity of the organization has, at least to some extent, been there for many years. More accurate would then perhaps be to interpret the current and future state as a kind of co-existence of multiple professional identities. Alvehus (2021) and Buffat (2014) indicate that rivalry between logics may be solved “on the surface”, even though there might still be tensions between the logics on a lower level where the old logic might continue to be the most influential guide to the behaviour of employees. So perhaps, the SEA might continue to be in a state of institutional complexity with two competing logics guiding the organization, as the logics can peacefully coexist “on the surface”, while the struggle continues on the frontline. But, Smets, Morris and Greenwood (2012) mean that institutional change may begin with mundane activities of practitioners trying to “get the job done”. These mundane activities first become rationalized at a lower level, and then move to a higher level and generate institutional change (“the microprocesses of institutionalization”). This might indicate that the influence for a change could come from the micro actors and that the hybrid identity of the enforcement officers (“the hybrid-bureaucratic identity”) eventually might influence the organization to take on a more hybrid logic in its internal communication, which could reduce the frontline tensions.

7.2 The hybridity of the SEA: easy or challenging – a matter of perspective

The hybridity of the SEA might seem easy when only viewed from an organizational perspective, as the organization manages the coexistence of the logics by emphasizing and downplaying the different logics depending on context, thus avoiding confrontations between the competing aspects of the logics, and between the logics and the public environment. At the same time, when looking at the hybridity from the perspective of the frontline workers the hybridity appears as challenging as there are several aspects of the hybridity that many frontline workers struggle with.

I will in this section further demonstrate how and why the organizational hybridity, and the management of the competing pressures of hybridity, might appear differently depending on whether one sees the phenomenon from an organizational-level or from an individual-level. This exploration will contribute to the research on organizational hybridity by showing that the tensions associated with organizational hybridity in the public sector might be unobtrusive and discreet, and only detected when explored in detail from the perspective of the employees working on the frontline of an organization.

Using the institutional logics perspective it is evident that the SEA is permeated by two, in some respects competing, logics: an entrepreneurial logic and a bureaucratic logic. The organization successfully manages this state of institutional complexity by a procedure that I have described as emphasizing/downplaying, i.e., to highlight/bring out one of the logics (and its underlying demands) and play down or even ignore the other logic depending on topic and context. The organization emphasizes the entrepreneurial logic in relation to internal- and external relations and communicational topics, and in relation to strategic approaches of a general character, while the rule-based bureaucratic logic is emphasized when an accurate and factual legal treatment is required, often for topics close to practice. This way the organization manages the competing pressures of hybridity without any detectable tensions or conflicts

However, the individuals working at the frontline cannot look away from the many varying demands of the prevailing logics during their work reality. And as most of them hold firmly on to a professional identity linked to the bureaucratic logic, most of the officers have difficulties managing the demands inherent in the entrepreneurial logic. However, there are also some officers who have developed a kind of hybrid identity. In comparison to their legalistic-bureaucratic colleagues these officers cope better with the entrepreneurial

demands as they have adapted the market concepts to better match the environment. As a result, when viewing the hybridity of the SEA from the perspective of the individuals working at the frontline level of the organization, the hybridity does not seem as easy as it appears from an organizational perspective. Instead it appears challenging for many of the frontline employees. In other words, there is a significant difference in how the hybridity appears depending on “where one looks” (Alvehus 2021).

This difference in how challenging the hybridity appears depending on where one looks may also be highlighted by focusing on specific aspects of the hybridity. What instigated my interest in the issue explored in this dissertation was the customer orientation of the SEA. When examining the case organization, the SEA, it is obvious that customer orientation is promoted as an important guiding rule on how the organization, and the employees, should act and behave. The concept of customer orientation is, by the SEA, mainly described and applied in a way that may be linked to how the concept has been presented within the marketing literature (i.e., as a strategy of being responsive to the customers’ needs) (Kohli & Jaworski 1990; Narver & Slater 1990), even though the SEA slightly adapt and form the concept to the public context. An essential feature of the SEA’s customer orientation is treating as well as referring to the clients as “customers”. The SEA does not simply apply the customer notion and assumes that its customers are and behave like the commercial sector customer (i.e., as an active and innovating character) (du Gay & Salaman 1992), or that they all can be treated the same way. Instead, the SEA constantly underscores that its customers act and behave differently. Thus, the organization is reshaping the connotation of the word, so that it better may be applied in the complex environment that the SEA operates.

In my analysis I have coded customer orientation as a prominent element of the entrepreneurial logic. This element of the logic is, just as the logic as a whole, emphasized by the organization in topics such as policies on how to relate to external stakeholders or policies on communication, while downplayed in (or simply ignored) in topics such as safety and threats. Customer orientation and its underlying demands is consequently an aspect of the institutional complexity that, by the tactic of slightly adapting the concept to the context while also emphasizing/downplaying the demands inherent in the concept with matching topics, seems rather unchallenging to manage in a public setting when viewed from an organizational-level perspective.

On the contrary, most of the enforcement officers struggle with the customer orientation of the organization and the demands embedded in the concept. The institutional logics perspective reveals that customer orientation may be seen as an element of the entrepreneurial logic, while most of the enforcement

officers hold on to a legalistic-bureaucratic identity. Therefore they have difficulties managing market-related demands.

A prominent manifestation of the customer orientation of the SEA is the re-characterization of the clients into customers. The SEA's use of the notion of "customers" surely has not escaped the enforcement officers and, just as has been reported in other research on public servants (e.g., Needham 2006), the issue of naming the persons they meet during their work is an issue that create a lot of thoughts and feelings among the enforcement officers. The feature of customer orientation that the enforcement officers who adhere to the legalistic-bureaucratic identity struggle the most with is probably the notion of customers. Shown by the number of enforcement officers that mentioned the many jokes that are targeting the SEA's use of the customer notion. These jokes can be interpreted as an act of resistance from officers who just cannot get the customer notion to fit into their daily work reality. A notion that they, however, cannot escape from and somehow must relate to as the organization, their employer, use the notion so frequently. The jokes are everywhere and cannot be avoided by anyone working on the frontline of the organization. Many enforcement officers also underscore that even though they joke about and/or dismiss the concept of customer orientation, they are still service oriented. These comments could be interpreted as they being aware of the caricature of the lazy bureaucrat who at the tax payers' expense is dragging his/her feet unconcerned about providing the citizens with service, and they want emphasize that they are far from that caricature. They have always been service oriented, just within a public context. Thus many enforcement officers defend their identities of being public servants, in contrast to how Buffat (2014) could report about how the employees of a Swiss public unemployment organization had a "hybrid belonging" that mostly was constructed in negative terms toward a stereotype of a public servant.

Another aspect that demonstrate that the hybridity of the SEA appears differently depending on perspective, is the focus on the brand of the organization. For instance, the SEA is, in internal communication, often describing how the organization is changing (or at least strive to change) from having been "internally oriented" to becoming "customer oriented". This is also described as a "change of corporate culture" and in terms of a "strategic movement". The brand orientation, and the narrative of a rebranding process may to some extent be linked to the opposing modes of managing public organizations presented in Chapter 3. In other words: away with the "ancient" internal-oriented bureaucratic culture, and bring in the new, the entrepreneurial culture – including market-inspired concepts such as customer orientation.

When viewing the organization from the institutional logics perspective I have coded brand orientation as one element of the entrepreneurial logic. When viewed as an element of this logic it is apparent that this element and its underlying demands of a cultural and brand-related change, just like customer orientation and the logic of entrepreneurialism as a whole, is emphasized or downplayed. For example, in visions of the organization's future development and the internal culture and external image, the brand orientation is emphasized, while it is downplayed or ignored when more practically oriented topics are discussed. In this way the brand orientation does not appear as challenging when viewed from an organizational level. However, the many officers with a professional identity that I have labelled as legalistic-bureaucratic cannot understand why the organization would need a change of brand. Especially not when the change is presented in terms of being a move away from the SEA being seen as though and harsh. In the view of these officers, such words are used to describe the reality that they face when using uncomfortable measures while enforcing the law.

One could perhaps argue that all organizations, at one time or another, are going through periods of reorganizations or rebranding that creates some internal tensions. And thus argue that the change of the SEA from a bureaucratic organization to a more "entrepreneurial" organization perhaps is just such a temporary period of re-organization that an organization needs to go through once in a while to improve? However, the narrative of a change of the brand cannot be considered to have been applied temporary, instead it has continued over time. The narrative describing the organization as either being in the process of change or being in need of going through a change has been repeated for at least the past ten years. The narrative has actually been repeated for an even longer time period. As seen in Chapter 5 the organization was already in the year 1988 describing how they aimed to change its image so that it no longer would be seen as "an anonymous and rough authority". Accordingly, the communicated narrative of the change of brand has been repeated for more than 30 years. To be in a constant process of change ought to be challenging. Especially if the change includes several features that you must struggle to comprehend.

Hence, I argue that describing the hybridity of the SEA - as easy or challenging - is a matter of perspective. When only viewed from an organizational point of view the hybridity might appear as easy, thus without causing any tensions or conflicts. But, when examined from the individual point of view it becomes evident that it actually is associated with internal tensions. This indeed resembles the "superficial hybridity" portrayed by Alvehus 2021, as the hybridity only exists, or at least only peacefully exists,

on the surface of the organization, while the tensions occur at the frontline (“beneath the surface”). These tensions are challenging for the individuals who must struggle with them during their daily work, but they might also be challenging for the organization as it creates a sluggish organization of reluctant employees. Moreover, it might create a gap between the employees working at the frontline and the management of the organization, which as seen in Chapter 6, also is something that has been sensed by the enforcement officers.

7.3 Discussion

In this chapter I have analysed the case of the SEA with the help of the institutional logics perspective. In the analysis I have coded the multiple demands of the SEA (in which the demands of customer orientation is included) as the elements of two different institutional logics: the entrepreneurial logic and the bureaucratic logic. The SEA manages the coexistence of these different, and to some extent competing, logics by a procedure of emphasizing and downplaying, in which the organization emphasize one of the logics, and downplay or ignore the other one, depending on context and topic. The organization may thus emphasize the bureaucratic logic and its embedded demands of legal security and focus on rules of procedures when discussing topics such as safety issues or other more practically oriented topics, i.e., topics that demand a more factual and legally oriented focus, and highlight the elements of the entrepreneurial logic when discussing topics that are more conceptual and has a less hands-on approach, such as general strategic approaches, internal and external relations, and on communicational approaches. In this way the organization avoids any direct encounters between the competing aspects of the logics, and between the logics and the public setting. This organizational strategy could be linked to other studies indicating a loose coupling between different logics, like in a study by Baker (2013) describing how tensions between the logics were resolved by separating the logics in accordance with the hierarchal structure of the organization. This is also similar to Meyer and Rowan’s (1977) ideas that organizations should decouple externally and ceremonially adopted policies from the internal operational practices.

In this chapter I have also analysed the enforcement officers and how they manage the competing pressures of the hybridity of the SEA. In my analysis I concluded that the enforcement officers mainly seem to be anchored in two

different professional identities: the professional identity of legalistic-bureaucracy, an identity to a large extent consistent with the bureaucratic logic, and the professional identity of hybrid-bureaucracy, a hybrid-oriented identity that is based on the values of bureaucracy but at the same time has adapted and incorporated the elements of the logic of entrepreneurialism, thus making it “hybrid”. The officers that adhere to the identity of legalistic-bureaucracy, which is the most common professional identity among the officers, often find it difficult to manage the demands inherent in the entrepreneurial logic, while the ones having adopted a more hybrid identity easier may manage the multiple, and sometimes contradictory, logics that are permeating the organization. The enforcement officers who have adopted a hybrid-bureaucratic identity respond in a way that have similarities to how Meyer et al. (2014) show how public servants they studied continued to have professional identities anchored in bureaucratic ideals but that they also added new managerial ideas to their professional identities, thus resulting in a hybrid identity. Similar results have also been reported by Nordstrand Berg and Pinheiro (2016) and Rao, Monin and Duran (2003).

However, the case of the SEA, where the majority of the enforcement officers hold on to bureaucratic values and a legalistic-bureaucratic identity, probably most resembles the results presented by Dahlmann and Grossvold (2017). In their study they found that some of the actors they studied respond to institutional complexity by blending logics while others persevere a strategy of status quo (thus holding on to the original logic). The case of the SEA also shed light to the interplay between the level of organization and the level of individuals as the institutional complexity of the SEA also affects the individuals working on the frontline on the organization, but although setting some limits of how they form their professional identity, they still have a rather high degree of agency to form their identities from their own experience of their work and the environment in which they work (similar to what has been found by Reissner 2019 and Bévort & Suddaby 2016).

With this chapter I also hope to have framed and closely described an outcome of hybridity that has also been observed by, for instance, Alvehus (2021) and Buffat (2014): that hybridity might seem easy and without tensions when viewed from an organizational level perspective but appearing as challenging when viewed from an individual (frontline) perspective. For, as I examined the case of the SEA, a noticeable outcome of the hybridity is the tensions that it causes on a frontline level, tensions that the enforcement officers have to struggle with during their daily work. Consequently, I have in this chapter presented some aspects of the hybridity of the SEA that I considered as appearing easy when only viewed from an organizational level

but revealed as challenging when viewed from an individual frontline perspective. This has many similarities with the superficial hybridity described by Alvehus (2021), i.e., a hybridity that have different outcomes on different levels. These results thus indicate that organizational hybridity might appear as very different depending on where one looks, and that researchers, to really understand hybridity, must look under the surface and explore the outcomes of hybridity on several levels.

In Chapter 1 I argued that the SEA constitutes a case that may be described as deviant or extreme as the SEA is a coercive public organization, and consequently sometimes must take coercive measures towards the organization's clients while also having adopted the concept of customer orientation. Coercive organizations has been described as being characterized by a "sense of territoriality" that manifests in a "us and them classification" (Soeters 2007), which would indicate that hybridity, and logics of another sector, would be more difficult to manage for the organization as well as for the employees, as it most likely would be met with more resistance. The fact that the SEA can be labelled as a coercive organization might therefore have contributed to some of the challenges with hybridity that I have identified in this study. Perhaps, employees of coercive organizations are more prone to hold on to traditional logics and professional identities and, because of their tendency to consider the managers as "them", therefore more likely to keep management ideas at arm's length.

8 Results, Conclusions and Contributions

This chapter is divided into three sections: first I will answer the research questions and summarize the results. I then further develop the conclusions that I believe can be made from the study, whereupon I discuss how the study contributes to the current research. The chapter ends with my thoughts on the result's implications on the case organization and what I consider that future research should be focused on.

The aim of this study is to understand the organizational and individual response to the hybridity that occurs when public organizations adopt market-inspired elements. To reach the aim I have examined public sector customer orientation. In other words, I have examined how public organizations, as well as their employees, manage customer orientation, and the demands that the concept presents, alongside the demands traditionally presented to public organizations, and which motives and explanations that may be observed regarding how they manage these different demands.

The study has been conducted as a case study of the Swedish Enforcement Authority (SEA) and the organization's strive to be customer oriented. The frontline public servants that I have studied has been the individuals employed at the frontline of the SEA's enforcement department - the enforcement officers. The SEA is a public organization that claims to be customer oriented, while the organization also has been assigned several tasks that requires the organization to take coercive measures towards its clients. The enforcement officers are the individuals who during their daily work, must manage the demands that come with the concept of customer orientation, while they also sometimes must take coercive measures towards the clients/customers. The case of the SEA may thus be said to constitute an extreme case of organizational hybridity.

8.1 Results

I presented the following research questions in chapter 1:

1. How is customer orientation manifested and described by public organizations and what demands do public organization consider that customer orientation presents?
2. How do public organizations manage the demands of customer orientation, alongside the other demands presented to public organizations, and what motives and explanations can be observed for how they manage this multiplicity of demands?
3. How do frontline public servants understand customer orientation when applied in public management?
4. How do frontline public servants manage the demands of customer orientation, alongside the other demands presented to them in the public setting and what motives and explanations can be observed for how they manage this multiplicity of demands?

Below I answer the research questions, one by one, based on my analysis of the case of the SEA.

1. The most prominent manifestation of the customer orientation of the SEA is the re-characterization of the organization's clients into "customers" in the organization's internal communication. Customer orientation, according to the SEA, is also about understanding the customers and their needs, and then being responsive to those needs. Moreover, an important aspect of customer orientation according to the SEA is the strive to create a "value" or even an "added value" for the customers. The SEA's description of customer orientation, thus, has several similarities with how the concept is presented in the marketing literature. Within the marketing literature customer orientation is often defined as a strategy of responding to the customers and their needs, and to create value for the customers is also often highlighted as an element, making organizations customer oriented according to the marketing literature. However, when described by the SEA customer orientation is also a matter of more actively trying to

adjust the customers and their behaviours into the path that the organization (and its principal, i.e., the government) wishes. Based on how customer orientation is manifested and described by the SEA, it presents several demands to the organization; to treat the clients as “customers”; to be responsive to the customers and to their needs; to strive towards creating value for the customers and finally; that the organization, and the employees, in some matters should strive to adjust the customers. The customer orientation of the SEA seems to be driven primarily by the idea that the organization must change from a “bureaucratic” organization into becoming more customer responsive, more market-like, and more “entrepreneurial”. From this follows that the customer orientation of the SEA also coincides with the adoption of other market-inspired principles that also present several market inspired demands to the organization.

2. The SEA is guided by six leading principles, of which customer orientation constitute one of three principles that may be categorized as market-inspired. The organization is also guided by three principles that can be linked to traditional public sector values. The principles all present several different demands to the organization and its employees on how to organize, act and behave. The market-related demands are in some aspects competing with the traditional demands of public administration. The SEA manages the coexistence of these competing demands by a procedure of choosing which demand(s) to emphasize, and which to play down or ignore depending on topic and context. In regard to general strategic approaches, policies on communication or the internal culture and external relations, in other words topics not linked to the daily operational practice, the organization highlights the market-inspired principles, such as customer orientation and brand orientation, and their underlying demands, such as the demand to be responsive to customers and to consider the brand, and play down demands traditionally associated with public activities such as the demand on legal security and the demand of objectivity. In regard to topics that are closer to the operational practice, and topics that require a factual and formal treatment, the organization focus on the more traditional demands of public administration, and play down (or ignore) the demands the market inspired principles (such as customer orientation). The way that the SEA is managing the multiplicity of demands is a seemingly successful strategy of avoiding conflicts between competing demands.

Meanwhile, the organization can maintain an image of being a customer oriented public organization.

3. Most of the frontline public servants of the SEA, i.e., the enforcement officers, understand the customer orientation of the SEA from a market perspective, and interpret the customer orientation of the organization as a signal that the clients ought to be treated in a “customer-like manner”, a manner they link to how customer relations often are presented in a business setting. Furthermore, many enforcement officers understand the customer orientation of the organization as an urge that they should adapt to the clients, primarily in regard to communication and language, for instance, to use a language the clients understand (and not use legal terms). Several enforcement officers also understand customer orientation as a sort of re-branding campaign of the organization, which is aimed at making the organization more market-like, a campaign in which they bundle together customer orientation with other market-inspired concepts.

4. Most of the enforcement officers hold firmly on to the ideals of bureaucracy, i.e., the traditional values of public activities, and experience that the market-related demands embedded in customer orientation (and the other market-inspired principles), sometimes conflict with their perspective on how to perform their job and their assignments and with the other demands presented to them in this setting. As a result they are hesitant or even reluctant to customer orientation and the demands that the concept presents, and they indulge in different acts of resistance, such as dismissing, and/or joking about, the market-inspired concepts used by the SEA. At the same time, a few enforcement officers have added market-inspired values and ideas to their professional ideals which facilitate for them to comply with the demands derived from the market sector. These public servants do not experience that there are any conflicts associated with the demands of customer orientation, instead they see the potential and rationality of applying customer orientation in a public setting.

In terms of organizational hybridity, the answers above demonstrate that public organizations respond to the hybridity that occurs when the organizations adopt market-inspired elements by a procedure of emphasizing and

downplaying different demands depending on context and topic. In this way the organizations avoid confrontations between competing demands and may maintain a hybrid organizational identity. This is, however, not a strategy applicable for the frontline public servants who cannot look away from any demands and who must manage the pressures of hybridity in daily work. Most of the individuals working at the public service frontline hold firmly on to a professional identity based on the traditional values of public administration. As a consequence they perceive that the demands that come with the hybridity, the market-related demands, sometimes conflict with their view on their work and duties, and they respond to the hybridity by ignoring or even resisting the market-related demands, but comply with the traditional demands of public administration. However, there are also frontline public servants who respond to the hybridity by forming the demands of the market-inspired elements to the public setting, allowing them to comply with both the market-related demands and the traditional public sector demands. Hence, the study shows that organizational hybridity in the public sector might appear easy when viewed from an organizational level, but more challenging when viewed from an individual level, as there are aspects of the hybridity that cause tensions among many of the individuals working at the frontline. Tensions that might be hidden under a calm organizational surface.

8.2 Conclusions

The aim with this study is to understand how public organizations, as well as their frontline employees, respond to the organizational hybridity that occurs when public organizations adopt market-inspired elements. The aim has been achieved by examining public sector customer orientation and the case of the SEA. From the study, one may conclude that customer orientation in a public context is applied in a way that has several similarities with how the concept has been conceptually described within the marketing literature (e.g., Kohli & Jaworski 1990; Narver & Slater 1990). Hence, the concept of customer orientation does not differentiate fundamentally when applied in a public setting from when applied by market organizations. Instead, several features are the same such as an emphasis on responding to the customers and the customers' needs, and an aim to create value to the customers. Accordingly, the concept of customer orientation, even when applied within a public context, comes with several market-related demands. From the study, one may conclude that the customer orientation of public organizations seems to be

driven by the idea that the organizations must change from being “bureaucratic” to becoming more market-like, or “entrepreneurial”, a movement which also has been described by numerous scholars (e.g., du Gay 2000; Premfors et al. 2003). As a consequence, the customer orientation of public organizations also coincides with the adoption of other market-inspired principles that also are embedded in market demands. Public organizations that hybridize by adopting the concept of customer orientation must, as a result, manage several market-related demands, such as to be responsive to customers and to consider brand, alongside the more traditional demands of public administration, such as to act legally secure and to always be objective. The organizational response to hybridity that I have detected in this study is a procedure of emphasizing certain demands and playing down or even ignoring other demands depending on context or topic, which is an organizational response to hybridity that is similar to the separation or decoupling strategies described in earlier research by for instance Fossestöl et al. (2015) and Baker (2013). When viewed from an organizational perspective the hybridity that occurs when public organizations adopt market-inspired elements may appear as rather easy to manage, or at least without causing any tensions.

However, this study also reveals, like several others before (e.g., Reay & Hinnings 2009; Bévort & Suddaby 2016; Reissner 2019; Jutterström 2019), that there are several aspects following in the wake of organizational hybridity that generates tensions on the level of individuals working at the operational level. As also has been indicated by Meyer et al. (2014), this study shows that frontline public servants tend to hold on to bureaucratic values and ideals. As a result many of them are having difficulties managing market-related demands, demands that they experience as incompatible with their own view on their job, their role and their duties, and consequently they ignore the market-related demands. The frontline tensions are, in the case studied, revealed by a resistance towards the market-inspired elements, and manifested in what I have labelled as an act of resistance of the frontline workers; a joking directed towards the demands of hybridity that they consider incompatible with their own view on their work reality. However, the study also indicates that some frontline public servants form the demands of market-inspired elements to fit the context, and mix them with the traditional values and ideals, which facilitates for them to better manage the multiple pressures of hybridity, similar to the results revealed by Nordstrand Berg and Pinheiro (2016).

Hence, the result of this study has several similarities with the superficial hybridity described by Alvehus (2021). I.e., it shows how organizational hybridity may have different outcomes on different levels. In other words, the study reveals that tensions associated with organizational hybridity in the

public sector might be discreet and unobtrusive, and only detected when the organization is examined in detail and from the perspective of the micro-actors, i.e., the frontline workers. Therefore, the challenges associated with organizational hybridity in the public sector might be underestimated.

However, even if organizational hybridity might be challenging, it also holds a potential, something that have been underscored by, for instance, Pache and Santos (2013), as they argue that hybrid organizations "...have access to much broader repertoire of institutional templates that they can combine in unique ways..." (p. 994). Therefore, one may ask, how may public organizations reduce the tensions of hybridity and instead benefit from hybridity? Research often highlights the importance of a clear communication and good leadership when reaching out to the organizational members (e.g., Drummond et al. 2000), and the importance of middle managers involving the employees in the strategic goals of the organization (Paarlberg 2007). This study indicates that a "hybrid-oriented" leadership, as suggested by Nordstrand Berg and Pinheiro (2016), would facilitate for hybrid public organizations to connect the different organizational levels and thereby decrease the frontline tensions caused by the hybridity. What perhaps also could facilitate for the employees to manage the hybridity could be to aim for a "hybrid organizational identity" (Battilana & Dorado 2010), which could guide the employees in how they should relate to the hybridity and how they should view the hybrid organization that they work for.

A potential tool for organizations to reduce the frontline tensions associated with hybridity might also be the theoretical framework used in this study: the institutional logics perspective. This is also suggested by Skelcher and Smith (2015) when they state that the institutional logics perspective might enable those working in public organizations to understand more about how to manage "plural institutional opportunities and constraints" (p. 445). Thus, to be able to frictionless manage hybridity, organizations might use the institutional logics perspective to understand the employees' professional identities and how these professional identities relate to the logics embedded in the strategies and communication of the organization.

From the study one may also conclude that hybridity in the public sector might be presented as a change of brand. Blessing (2012) offers four different symbolic interpretations of hybridity of which one is "hybridity as a state of transformation". According to Blessing, this interpretation signals the "blurring of sectorial boundaries" and she warns that: "[...] while transformation may be a valid lens through which to view the hybrid form, it leaves much to be explained. It does not account for stable hybrid arrangements, nor does it reveal the causes of change" (Blessing 2012: 195).

What Blessing implies here is that hybridity narrated as a change of brand is not an effective approach in the long run. Instead, the public organizations should aim to present the hybridity as a definite and permanent state in where the organization have entered a new state.

Is customer orientation a concept for the future public management? In other words, is the concept of customer orientation the method to achieve a turn-around for sometimes rigid and unresponsive public organizations (as it occasionally has been indicated in earlier research, e.g., Drummond et al. 2000)? Or might the concept, as it is also sometimes claimed (e.g., Cheung 2005), just wind up as empty phrases, instead of actual improvements for the clients such as information simplicity, increased accessibility etc.? If listening to the critics the concept might even put social justice and equity at risk (Aberbach & Christensen 2005). This study indicates that the answer to the question of whether customer orientation may be adopted in a public setting is that it depends on how the concept is applied. The study indicates that a public organization, to succeed with a customer orientation, must adapt the concept to the specific setting of the organization, and work extensively with its implementation.

Clarke et al. (2007) ask “what’s in a word?”, and this study shows that the word “customer” is a big “trigger” for many of the public servants. Sometimes the debate about market-inspiration within public management also tend to end up in a semantics discussion (and often about the suitability to refer to the public sector clients as “customers”). However, I hope this study has shown that there is a challenge with a market-inspired hybridity in public management that goes deeper than just being concerned with semantics. Moreover, a more profound understanding about the employees’ professional identities and what these identities imply, and how this ought to affect the internal communication, would probably facilitate for the hybridity of public organizations to be successful. Moreover, this study uncovers some aspects of public sector customer orientation that are particularly complex: *Firstly*, customer orientation rests on a strive to be customer responsive. At the same time, public organizations must deal with customers who do not demand the treatment that society deems to be best for them. This means that customer-oriented public organizations, somehow must rise above the customer and know when to be customer responsive and when not to. *Secondly*, many public organizations acts in an environment of multiple stakeholders with sometimes conflicting requirements. Accordingly, customer-responsiveness in a public setting is a balance act in which the organizations must decide when to be responsive and towards who (what customer). *Lastly*, public organizations must manage the customer notion while the idea of referring to the clients as “customers”

remains a rather infected issue. Many public servants still think about the “customer” from the business point-of-view. This means that the customer-oriented public organizations must be very clear about what they mean with the customer notion, or else it might just end up as a cause for internal conflict. And from what has been presented in this dissertation the appropriateness of the notion in public service will probably remain debated.

To the above one may also add the ingredient of coercion. Because the above aspects are difficulties that many public organizations will have to deal with. However, in the “extreme” case of coercive public organizations, the organizations must manage customer orientation while also having to be authoritarian and sometimes take coercive measures towards its customers. Undoubtedly the ingredient of coercion adds to the complexity. However, the literature shows that customer orientation (and service orientation) in theory may be used in coercive public activities (Alford 2002; Alford & Speed 2006)¹²⁰. Therefore, customer orientation should, at least in theory, be an effective and cost-reducing alternative to coercive measures. This study does not provide us with a definite answer to in what extent customer orientation might be an alternative to coercive measures in practice (this is a question for other research to find out, research focusing on the actual customers and how they react to different treatment). However, the study indicate that many challenges await the coercive public organizations that adopt the concept of customer orientation to improve its activities. What the case definitely shows is that if public organizations are to be successful in their customer orientation, they must learn to develop a customer orientation defined by the character and environment of the specific organization, rather than just straight off adopting customer orientation as depicted by marketing scholars.

The concept of customer orientation is often said to be difficult to operationalize (Duffy, Bruce, Moroko & Groeger 2020). This is also confirmed with this study, as it shows that the concept is more easily adopted on a strategic level, but more difficult to handle on the operational level. From the study, one may also conclude that customer orientation in this kind of public context is an approach that, at least in part, is supposed to entail, as well as explicitly motivated by, a change of the organizations to become more “entrepreneurial”. In other words, more user-friendly, adaptable, pro-active etc., and infused with an “entrepreneurial spirit”, hence, linked to NPM and the anti-bureaucratic movement. An interrelated interpretation could be that it

¹²⁰ Some tax researchers have even claim that a service-oriented public administration might increase tax compliance (e.g., Alm & Martinez-Vazquez 2010; Gangl, Hofmann & Kirchler 2015)

is an approach intended to construct organizational legitimacy in a time when NPM-related demands are imposed on public organizations to become more modern and customer-oriented organizations. The customer orientation of public organizations could, in consistence with Meyer and Rowan's (1977) idea, be a way to create organizational legitimacy by adapting to "institutionalized myths". In case one considers the adoption of customer orientation by public organizations as an adaption to an institutional myth, then strategic statements about having the "customers' focus" are enough. Therefore, the use of the concept is then rather about changing the authority's image than setting up an approach that forms the services and actually directs the work of the employees in practice.

This study has been conducted as a case study of the Swedish Enforcement Authority and it is important to emphasize that the generalizability of single case studies sometimes is disputed. This case may be categorized as "extreme" as it is focusing on a public organization that might be categorized as coercive. Just as when Sahlin-Andersson (1998) examined the SEA, it is also apparent that the organization constantly balances between its authoritarian role and its service obligations as a part of the civil service. This duality is also present in the organization's relation towards the citizens and the public; the organization must be both cooperative and authoritarian. Undoubtedly these dualities, in many ways, affect the organization, and it is something that the organization as well as the employees always has to relate to. That is a special circumstance that makes this case organization an "extreme case". That coercive organization often are characterized by an "us and them classification" towards, for instance, the managers (Soeters 2007), would also, presumably, increase the likelihood that the hybridity of such an organization would be challenging and meet resistance among frontline employees. One must also take in consideration that there is a wide range of different kinds of public organizations, handling very dissimilar activities ranging from public transport to health care and criminal justice. Coercive public organizations entail the extraordinary element of having to sometimes take coercive measures towards the citizen-clients, which makes them special from a "customer-orientation perspective". All these special circumstances must, thus, be remembered when drawing conclusions that might be generalized to other public organizations.

8.3 Contributions

This study reveals that competing pressures of organizational hybridity, i.e., the competing demands, by organizations can be managed by emphasizing and playing down different demands depending on topic/context. This result may be compared to Baker's (2013) study in which the organization studied applied a strategy of separating the different pressures of the hybridity into different departments or along the organizational hierarchy. This could be compared to Fossetöl et al. (2015) and the strategy they labelled "negative hybridity", a separation of the demands. Furthermore, it may also be compared to Meyer and Rowan's (1977) paper in which they recommend organizations to decouple external pressures from the work activities by creating gaps between formal organizational policies and organizational practices and to the organizational response to competing pressures that Oliver (1991) described as "compromise" – an active balancing of different pressures.

This strategy is, however, more difficult to apply for the employees of the organizations, especially for those working on the frontline level of the organizations, as they must handle the competing pressures in relation to, sometimes complex and intricate, practical situations. The individuals examined in this study tend to hold on to the traditional values of the sector/their profession, a similar tendency has also been reported by for instance Meyer et al. (2014). The fact that they hold on to the traditional values leads to them having difficulties embracing new concepts, and the demands inherent in these concepts, and often they ignore the market-inspired elements and the market-related demands. Moreover, this might lead to that they, in what could be interpreted as an act of resistance, joke about the elements that come with the hybridity. However, an important circumstance explored in this study is that employees also may embrace a "hybrid identity", an identity that aids them to manage, and comply, with the multiple, and sometimes competing demands that are presented to them because of the hybridity. Similar results have also been reported by Nordstrand Berg and Pinheiro (2016). They say that professionals that are infused with new logics are not necessarily leaving previous logics behind but are rather developing them further in hybridization. This is also consistent with Rao, Monin and Duran (2003) who have shown how individuals may chose not to fully adopt a new logic that they are exposed to, and instead partially hang on to the old logic. The results of the study may

also be compared to Jutterströms (2019) results showing that organizational hybridity might lead to conflicts at the operational level and end up as problematic for the daily practice. Moreover, the study contribute as it is a case exploring the interplay between the organizational- and individual level of an hybrid organization, and just as has been reported in earlier studies (Reissner 2019; Bévort & Suddaby 2016), the hybridity affects the individuals, still they have a high degree in agency of how they view the organization and how they form their professional identities

It has in various research been suggested that organizational hybridity might be challenging for organizations and for employees (e.g., Alexius & Furusten 2019b: 12). I have in this study disclosed that even though organizational hybridity might seem easy when viewed only from an organizational level perspective, the hybridity might appear challenging when viewed from the perspective of the individuals. This result further adds to conclusions presented by Buffat (2014) who states that there might be a discrepancy between how the organization present the hybridity and working practices, and to how Alvehus (2021) presents a “superficial hybridity”, indicating that true hybridity perhaps exists only on the “surface”. At the case organization of this study, tensionless hybridity exists only on an organizational level while a frontline exploration reveals that it is more a matter of tensions and struggles.

Moreover, the study contributes to the research on the customer orientation of public organizations. For instance, it reveals hesitation, and even resistance, among frontline public servants following in the wake of the *customer orientation* of public organizations, a result supporting earlier research (e.g., Tuck, Lamb & Hoskin 2011; Westermarland 2010). The study indicates that frontline public servants tend to apply their own understanding and rationalization of why the concept is adopted in this kind of context, rather than fully incorporating the organization’s description, similar to how public servants tend to handle the customer notion according to Rosenthal and Peccei (2006). As frontline public servants tend to be hesitant or even reluctant, towards the concept, the concept might be a source for organizational tensions in case it is frequently applied in organizational- and management communication. Same discrepancy between how management see the concept compared to how the frontline sees it has also been described in earlier research, for instance, by Whelan et al. (2010). An aspect of customer orientation that seems to be especially difficult for frontline public servants to manage is the concept of referring to the clients as “customers”, primarily because they associate the notion with a business relationship and find it difficult to apply in a public context. However, it is also important to

underscore that the study also reveals that some frontline public servants also may acknowledge the benefits of customer orienting in a public organization.

Scholars have warned that the customer orientation of public organizations means an oversimplification of a complex reality (e.g., Hirschmann 1999), and that public organizations must consider a multiplicity of customers and various (and sometimes conflicting) customer requirements, unlike for-profit market organizations. How do you “put the customers first” when the customers have very different, possibly even opposing, wants and needs? This study, in some aspects, prove these critics right. I have in this study not found any organizational considerations concerning the impartiality and objectivity in relation to the customer orientation. Furthermore, the clash between objectivity and customer orientation is one factor making the concept more difficult and complex at the more practical oriented frontline level. However, this may also be a reason why public sector customer orientation might be theoretical. Statements that the aim is to “create value for the customers” is indefinitely enough to fit in an environment with multiple stakeholders having various requirements.

The customer orientation of public organizations is also often criticized based on the re-characterization of the citizens into customers (e.g., Peters 1998; Fountain 2001; Laing 2003). In this study, I have shown that even though a public organization may refer to its clients as “customers”, it may still try to avoid the market- and commercial connotations of the notion. Tuck, Lamb and Hoskins (2011) have reported how the public organization they studied seemed to be trying to construct the customer in “a fuller sense” so that the organization would be able to implement “customer focus”, a similar interpretation could be made in relation to this study; the customer notion might be a way to become “customer oriented”.

A “customer satisfaction rhetoric” and a “discourse of need” is often implied in the concept of customer orientation, and critics sometimes claim that this kind of rhetoric suits a public organization poorly as the “experts” (i.e., the public servants) know better than the general public what ought to be done (in other words: the customers of public services often do not know what is in their best interest) (Fountain 2001). This “customer satisfaction rhetoric” might, according to the critics, also lead to that public organizations might listen too much to their (ill-informed) customers (and in worst case first and foremost listen to the most loudly speaking customers) (e.g., Peters 1998; Fountain 2001). The SEA is holding on to a customer satisfaction rhetoric (“respond to the customers and their needs”) while at the same time also asserting that the customers sometimes do not know what it is that is their true needs. Consequently, the public servants of the SEA are the “experts”, as they are the

ones who, in the end, must decide what it is that is the true needs of the organization's customers. The case also indicates that customer orientation in this kind of environment also entails to activate or direct the customers towards certain behaviours. Customer orientation consequently, in a public setting, is not just about satisfying the customers, but instead seems to require a more active and operative organization.

The results of this study may also be linked to the influential work of Lipsky (2010/1980). Lipsky, in his influential book, proclaims that the actual policy of public organizations is constructed by the employees who implement it in practice. In other words, it is the "street-level bureaucrats" who, as a result of their great amount of discretion and the complexity they confront during work (such as limited resources and unwilling customers) decide public organizations' true policies. Management ideas are therefore often not implemented exactly as they were intended, instead, they are changed when confronted with the complex reality of the street-level. This is also indicated in this study as the concept of customer orientation, for many frontline employees, is experienced as incompatible with the reality they meet. As a result, they either resist or ignore the concept, or adapt it to their reality. Consequently, just as described by Lipsky, they decide how the concept should be implemented in practice, not management. This study may thus be said to constitute a link between Lipsky's influential theory and the research on hybridity, indicating that hybridity might be one thing when rolled out by management and viewed from a policy perspective (the organizational level), and another thing when confronted with the frontline reality (or with the terminology of Lipsky; from a street-level perspective). Hybridity is consequently in the hands of the true policy makers: the "street-level bureaucrats".

8.4 Some recommendations to the SEA

During the writing of this dissertation I have been an "insider" of the organization that I also study. In other words, I have both been working in, and studying, the case organization, the SEA. Although the organization functions as a case to improve our understanding of hybridity in the public sector, and of public sector customer orientation, in general, the organization itself may also benefit from the study. In Chapter 7 I characterized the SEA as a "segmented hybrid" (with reference to Skelcher & Smith's 2015 categorization of hybrids). However, the organization could also be said to be bordering to being a

“blocked hybrid”. According to Skelcher and Smith’s classification the blocked hybrid implies a hybrid organization that is dysfunctional due to its inability to handle the tensions between different logics.

A relevant question to ask is why it is problem for the SEA to become a “blocked” hybrid when the organization is managing the hybridity by emphasizing and/or downplaying the different pressures of the hybridity and thereby avoiding any direct confrontation between the competing pressures? This warning is based on the tensions at the level of individuals working at the frontline of the organization, tensions that come from the fact that the employees continuously struggle with the hybridity. Even though I, in accordance with my philosophical approach (as presented in Chapter 2), have intended to write a description of the case “in-depth” enough to let the readers draw their own conclusions, I will here present some brief suggestions on how the SEA could interpret and act as a result of the research project. In other words, I will here present my own reflections on how the case organization, the Swedish Enforcement Authority, could benefit from the study and avoid being “blocked” by hybridity.

A prominent element of the hybridization of the SEA is the customer orientation of the organization. As seen, several previous studies have revealed a discrepancy between frontline and management in regard to the customer orientation of public organizations (e.g., Radnor & Johnston 2013; Clarke et al. 2007). It is also apparent that it is the case within the SEA. This discrepancy could perhaps be avoided by a more distinct customer orientation approach, in which the organization clearly describes what it means for the organization to be customer oriented and, not least, what the concept should imply for the employees. This strategy would have to be clear also regarding difficult issues such as who the customer is in this kind of setting. From what has been reported in other studies, it should not come as a surprise that the concept of referring to public service clients as customers is opposed by some of the frontline workers. I will not advice the organization to stop referring to the clients as customers (I must admit that I often have heard comments indicating that the issue of customer orientation only is a matter of wording or that it is just semantics, I believe that it is more than a matter of semantics). However, I believe that the notion of customers must be better communicated; what does the organization imply by using the notion? A more distinct customer-orientated approach would also have to be clear about what level of service the customer might expect. Most importantly, the organization must implement this strategy internally so that it does not end up as just another management communication that is dismissed by the frontline. An alternative could be to develop a customer orientation based on the social-exchange theory (Alford

2002), that explains customer orientation in a way that I believe that many of the enforcement officers would understand, and even embrace, as it is rather tangible, and easy to link to the activities of coercive public organizations. An alternative to be customer oriented or to “have the customer’s focus” (as stated in the organization’s current main strategy) could be to phrase the strategy as aiming to be service oriented. This is an orientation that would probably be easier to anchor among the enforcement officers as many seem to be motivated by providing the clients with help and service but are bothered with the business connotations of customer orientation. Another alternative would be *stakeholder orientation* (as suggested by Smith, Drumwright & Gentile 2010). An approach that perhaps would make a lot of sense for an organization in a complex environment of multiple *stakeholders*. Something that also would be beneficial for the SEA would be to improve its *multivocality*: The capacity to communicate with different stakeholders based on different institutional orders (Alexius & Furusten 2019a: 352-356). The organization should, in other words, be more flexible and adapt according to situation and stakeholder.

A lot of the tensions associated with the hybridity of the SEA perhaps could be avoided by an increased focus on the internal communication. The SEA focuses a lot on the external communication and how to communicate with its customers. However, the organization would also benefit from increasing its focus on the internal communication and how to implement and anchor the strategies of the organization among the employees. The gap between management and the frontline of the organization could, for instance, be reduced by management really making the frontline understand why the organization is “hybridizing” and how the organization, the employees and the “customers” will benefit from it. The organization would also benefit from an increased understanding of the complex reality that many of them confront in their daily work. Along with increased understanding that most enforcement officers do not find their motivation in hunting for quantifiable measures, instead they find their motivation in helping people and to be of benefit to society.

Leadership is crucial in succeeding with the hybridization of an organization. Often, the middle managers are highlighted as key persons in the implementation of organizational strategies. The SEA would benefit from an increased awareness among team-managers on how to communicate the organization’s strategies, so that they do not get stuck between two organizational levels with sometimes competing views on the organization’s strategies and approaches. The SEA would also benefit from better taking advantage of the opportunities of bureaucracy and better highlight the many advantages with the legalistic-bureaucratic values. This study reveals that

frontline public servants tend to identify with bureaucratic principles and a fruitful way to reach out to the “reluctant” enforcement officers would thus probably be to emphasize the potentials of bureaucracy. Perhaps the SEA could find inspiration in the hybrid-oriented enforcement officers and aim to be more “hybrid-bureaucratic”, and to have it both ways – bureaucratic principles along with service-oriented aspects of the market.

8.5 From entrepreneurial public management to a hybrid management?

In Chapter 3, I presented how public organizations that had been governed by bureaucratic principles, began to be reformed with the business sector as role model. Market-inspired concepts, and a more “entrepreneurial” way of managing, were being implemented within public management. This reform-movement, often labelled as NPM, was based on the idea that bureaucracy was failing, as it was unresponsive towards the clients and, not least, as it had led to that public servants developed a “bureaucratic mentality” that opposed changes. The customer orientation of public organizations and the following hybridity in public management (public organizations applying concepts, approaches and strategies from the market), may be interpreted as results of this movement. However, in recent years the critique against NPM and its components has been increasing and instead the more traditional way of considering public service has more and more been highlighted as a better pathway for public management (see for instance Dahlsten 2020: 135 ff.). Rather than managing the public sector based on the philosophies of market-liberalism it is often proclaimed that we must start to manage the public sector based on an increased trust of the public servants, a trust in them wanting to take responsibility. In other words, that public servants must be given an increased impact and recognition. There has also been an increased interest in “public value governance”. Furthermore, the Swedish governments “delegation for trust-based public management” (SOU 2019:43) might be an indication of an upcoming change in how to manage the public sector (i.e. away from entrepreneurial management and towards a more trust-based way of managing the public sector, a management on the public servants’ terms).

However, no one would probably want to roll back an unresponsive “bureaucratic” public sector (with bureaucratic meaning red-tape and “Kafkaesque” interactions). An alternative could be to aim for a hybrid-oriented management of public organizations: a “hybrid-bureaucracy” or

“bureaucracy lite”. This study reveals that some frontline employees have developed a hybrid-bureaucratic professional identity built on a mix of bureaucratic principles and a more “modernized” and outward approach of being service-minded and customer oriented. Perhaps this kind of hybridization could also be an alternative when searching for a new way of managing the public sector. A way beyond the opposites of bureaucratic administration and entrepreneurial public management.

8.6 Suggestions for future research

What questions remains unanswered after this research project is over? Obviously, this study offers only a scratch on the surface of all the issues that might face the complex reality of public organizations, and perhaps Geertz (1983) was right when claiming that scientific progress is a matter of getting better with “the precision with which we vex each other” (p.230). Nevertheless, I hope that this study has contributed as a small piece to a perhaps gigantic puzzle. Then what other pieces of the puzzles could future researchers look for?

This research project has not at all been focusing on the actual “customers”, i.e., the users of public services, and one aspect that would be exciting to examine is if, and if so how, the actual customers benefit from public sector hybridity. One question that also might need further research is the question of how the clients of public organizations think about being characterized as “customers” of public services, and whether the customer orientation of public organizations actually is resulting in any “user-value”. A topic that also would deserve further attention is whether customer orientation actually is an effective alternative to coercive measures. These are issues that could be examined from several different angles and with both qualitative as well as quantitative methods.

In this dissertation I have also called for a hybrid-oriented leadership that would facilitate for the organization to reach out to the frontline employees in a complex and hybrid environment. An interesting aspect to further explore is the leadership in hybrid organizations. What kind of leadership does hybrid organizations require? Such research could perhaps also function as a guide for how to develop a hybrid-oriented leadership that might facilitate for public organizations that must manage diverse employees in a complex environment. I have, in this study, focused on the frontline employees, however, it would also be interesting to focus on middle-managers and how they cope with the

hybridity. Middle managers of hybrid organizations in general, but perhaps especially interesting, the middle-managers of hybrid public organizations, as they seem to be stuck in between the legalistic-bureaucratic “street-level bureaucrats” and the entrepreneurial pressures from management.

In this study I have analysed the frontline public servants’ response to competing pressures of hybridity from the point of view of professional identities. However, I have not further examined what it is that causes their choice of identities. How individuals form their identities in an environment of multiple pressures has been explored by for instance Bévort and Suddaby (2016), however, further studies may increase our knowledge about how frontline employees navigate between the different possible professional identities of a hybrid public setting.

Another aspect of hybridity that scholars could further explore is the interplay between the organizational and strategic level and the level of individuals working at the frontline of the organizations. In this study, I have built on to some earlier research indicating that the employees of the organizations are affected by the hybridity and I have also showed that competing pressures of hybridity might be successfully managed on an organizational level but more challenging on an individual frontline level. Further research could explore this interplay in detail to understand, for instance, whether the hybridity play out differently on several different levels or departments of an organization.

Afterword

This dissertation opened with a preface in which I described my thoughts as a new employee at the SEA. When I am writing this afterword, I have been employed at the SEA for over ten years. Of course, the organization, and the world surrounding it, has changed during these years. Still, I believe that the questions I asked myself back then still remain applicable, and the issue of hybridizing public organizations, and what this implies for the public organizations and the public servants, is still highly relevant. Market-inspired reforms of public services is a topic still frequently debated, within the public debate, and within the SEA. Still, I can, during my daily work as an enforcement officer, sometimes hear sore comments about management's market-influenced communication. I hope that this study may, at least in part, take this debate a step forward, and help the SEA to reduce the distance between the levels of the organization.

This study has been conducted as an ethnographic study, while working as one of the enforcement officers. This fact has forced me to sometimes reflect on my own influence on the research and the results that I find. An apt question to ask is also whether I lean towards a legalistic-bureaucratic professional identity or towards a hybrid-bureaucratic. I believe that this is a question that I cannot answer, but my aim, and my belief, is that I have been able to somehow avoid falling into a certain approach and mind-set concerning the issues of this study. To study the organization that I also have been employed by have sometimes been challenging. I have been a "hybrid" enforcement officer and a "hybrid" PhD-student, and moved between the world of public management and the academic world. I have experienced these worlds as surprisingly different, and I have sometimes felt that these two roles have been difficult to conjoin. What may be considered as natural in one of these worlds may be questioned, even repealed, in the other. Hybridity may, without doubt, be challenging in many context and situations.

When reading this dissertation, one may perhaps find the enforcement officers reluctant and reactionary. Therefore, it is important for me to close this dissertation by emphasising the commitment to the job that I have seen among so many of the officers I have met as a part of this research study. Many

enforcement officers are also extremely proud of their job, and devoted to helping the people they meet during work, people that are often in a difficult situation that affect not only their economy but, one may claim, their whole existence. I believe a reason for the resistance among some of the officers is their commitment. They want the activities to be accurately performed and in a way that they consider as appropriate. It must also be underscored that they are that committed, even though being employed at an organization that, as was described in the preface, most often evokes negative associations, and there are seldom anyone showing appreciation towards their profession and their work. During the spring of 2022 it has also been reported that the number of reported incidents of threats and violence against the enforcement officers has increased. Moreover, it has not only increased but have also become more brutal, which has led to that the authority has started to anonymize the decisions of the enforcement officers¹²¹.

Lastly, philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer has written that “...thoughts put down on paper are nothing more than footprints in the sand: one sees the road the man has taken, but in order to know what he saw on the way, one requires his eyes”. The quote may illustrate how I feel about this dissertation and the insights it conveys. It has been my intention to provide the reader with a description and analysis “thick” enough to let the reader come to her/his own conclusions. Still, the text presented here is just my “footprints in the sand”, and in case the reader experiences the results and conclusions as inaccurate, I advise her/him to follow my footsteps, and become a part of the debate by showing where I got lost.

¹²¹ Publikt (2022).

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- Intranet 30/05/2011 ”Ett tydligt steg framåt på strategidagarna”.
- Intranet 23/08/2011 ”Intervju med Lena Bäcker – ny chef för verksamhetsområde 1”.
- Intranet 30/08/2011 ”Prestationsutveckling – vad är det och för vilka?”
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Intranet 07/12/2012 ”Ditt bidrag till vår kundundersökning”.

Intranet 31/03/2014 ”Uppdrag: Att hitta och ta bort slöseri med tid”.

Intranet 12/03/2015 ”Nya gränssnitt när vi börjar sälja på nätet”.

Intranet 05/06/2015 ”Eva Liedström Adler: Dialogens kraft är stor”.

Intranet 18/04/2016 ”Ersättningsresan tar grepp om kunderna”.

Intranet 22/04/2016 ”Kronofogden 2025 kommer att bli din vardag”.

Intranet 20/06/2016 ”Vägen till 2025: Chefer som ger medarbetarna förutsättningar att förbättra verksamheten”.

Intranet 05/07/2016 ”Vägen till 2025: ständiga förbättringar på gång”.

Intranet 26/09/2016 ”De kriminella går inte säkra på krogen”.

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Intranet 03/02/2017 ”Viktiga pengar dras undan från kriminella med hjälp av riksjouren”.

Intranet 28/02/2017 ”Nu är funktionen för innovation i gång”.

Intranet 05/04/2017 ”Myndighetssamverkan gav 55 miljoner i utmäta tillgångar”.

Intranet 23/05/2017 ”Utvecklingsavdelning – viktigt steg mot en modernare myndighet”.

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Intranet 30/08/2018 ”Medelshanteringen. Frågor och svar”.

Intranet 27/04/2018 ”Fredagsbilden: en mjukare myndighet”.

Intranet 06/03/2018 ”Med nuvarande arbetssätt blir vi aldrig av med evighetsgäldenärerna”.

Intranet 18/01/2019 ”Fredagsbilden: Kan vi lära av produktionsstyrning inom bildelsbranschen?”

Intranet 02/07/2019 ”Så utvecklar vi vår myndighet”.

APPENDIX I – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Interview session One (Interview nr 1 – 26) Performed during February – April 2018

Questions

Comments

- **How do you and your colleagues entitle the individuals that you come in contact with during your work?**
- **The SEA sometimes uses the notion of “customers” when referring to its clients, do you have any thoughts on this? Why do you think the SEA has chosen to apply the notion of “customers”?**
- **In which contexts, and in which channels, have you noticed that the SEA refers to its clients as customers?**
- **Do you ever use the notion of customers during your work as an enforcement officer?**
- **Would it be possible to describe a “typical customer” of the SEA? And what do the persons that you come in contact with require from you and from the SEA?**

The initial set of questions revolved around the issue of how to name the persons that the officers come in contact with during work, and how they relate to the fact that the SEA apply the notion of “customers”. Thus, these questions were related to research question no. 2 (how the enforcement officers understand and relate to the customer orientation of the SEA). These questions were aiming to initiate the officers to talk about “customers” and the customer orientation of the SEA.

- **What, would you say, is your main inspiration and guidance regarding your work and regarding your attitude towards the people you meet during your work?**
- **The SEA states that it aims to have the “customer in focus”, and to have a customer-oriented approach. What are your thoughts about these statements?**
- **Do you consider that the authority today has got the “customer in focus”?**
- **Do you consider that you and your closest colleagues have got the “customer in focus”?**
- **In the personal development plan it is written under the heading “helpful”: “I have a customer perspective in everything I do”. Would you say that the authority’s customer perspective affects you in any way during your daily work? Do you ever think in terms of having a customer-oriented approach?**
- **The SEA has stated that it aims at creating a customer culture and that it aims at being a customer driven organization? Why do you think that the organization is meaning with these statements?**

After having initiated a discussion about the notion of customers and the customer orientation of the SEA my aim was to lead the discussion into guiding principles and what demands that the officers felt they have to relate to. In other words, the answer I hoped to get were associated with research question 2 and 4. My aim was to initiate a discussion about what it is that guides the officers in their work as well as to understand how they manage the demands embedded in the SEA’s customer orientation.

- **”We have a mental picture of ourselves as service providers rather than authority exercisers”. This is a quote from the strategy of the summary procedures. What are your thoughts on this quote?**
- **Do you believe that the authority’s customer focus in any way has changed the authority’s activities and procedures?**
- **The SEA sometimes states that it aims to have an “outside-and-in perspective” and that the organization has and has had an “inside-and-out perspective”. What is meant with that? And do you agree?**
- **How do you think that other employees at the authority relate to the customer orientation? Are there any differences between processes? And between management and other employees? (If so, does this affect the organization in any way?**

The final set of questions were aiming to deepen the discussion about different demands embedded in customer orientation and how the enforcement officers relate to those demands during their daily work (alongside the other coexisting demands).

Interview Session Two (Interview nr 27 – 37) Performed during May - June 2019

- **How do you and your colleagues entitle the individuals that you come in contact with during your daily work?**
- **The SEA sometimes use the notion of “customers” when referring to the clients, do you have any thoughts on this?**
- **Why do you think the authority has chosen to apply the notion?**
- **In which contexts, and in which channel, have you noticed that the SEA refer to its clients as customers?**
- **Do you ever use the notion of customers during your work as an enforcement officer?**

See comments above. I did some minor modifications of the questions between session one and two based on how I had felt that the discussions had been during the first session.

- **The SEA state in its strategies that it aims at having the “customers’ focus”. What are your thoughts about this statement?**
- **Do you consider that the authority today has got the “customers’ focus”?**
- **Do you consider that you and your closest colleagues have the “customers’ focus”?**
- **In the personal development plan it is stated: “I have a customer perspective in everything I do”. Would you say that the authority’s customer perspective affect you in any way during your day-to-day work? Do you ever think in terms of having a customer-oriented approach?**
- **The SEA has stated that it aims at creating a customer culture and that it aims at being a customer driven organization? Why do you think that statement means?**

- **Do you believe that the authority's customer focus in any way has changed the authority or its procedures?**
- **The SEA sometimes states that it aims to have an "outside-and-in perspective" and that the organization has and has had an "inside-and-out perspective". What is meant with that? And do you agree?**
- **How do you think that other employees at the authority relate to the customer perspective? Are there any differences between processes? And between management and other employees? (If so, does this affect the organization in any way?**

One (Interview nr 1 – 26) Performed during February – April 2018

Interview Session Two Performed during June 2019

1. "Sofia"	15. "Stina"	27. "Nora"
2. "Maria"	16. "Marta"	28. "Lena"
3. "Anton"	17. "Adam"	29. "Robert"
4. "Samuel"	18. "Elsa"	30. "Anna"
5. "Daniel"	19. "Isak"	31. "Inger"
6. "Stig"	20. "Nils"	32. "Elisabeth"
7. "Lars"	21. "Astrid"	33. "Mika"
8. "Viktor"	22. "John"	34. "Kia"
9. "Harry"	23. "David"	35. "Malin"
10. "Molly"	24. "Josef"	36. "Mats"
11. "Leo"	25. "Olof"	37. "Martin"
12. "Karl"	26. "Svea"	
13. "Ingrid"		
14. "Elise"		

APPENDIX II – OVERVIEW OVER STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS

Document	The logic(s) leading the document	Representative statement(s)
<p>"Kronofogdens strategi för effektiva kundmöten"</p> <p>(2009)</p> <p>The SEA's strategy for effective customer meetings</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic</p> <p>This document is distinctly imbued with the entrepreneurial logic and highlighting customer orientation. It is stated that to achieve "effective customer meetings" the authority, and its employees, must be "<i>customer oriented</i>" and it is underscored that the clients ought to be referred to as "<i>customers</i>". It is also emphasized that the organization's activities always must start from the "<i>customers' needs and expectations</i>", and that the customers should be met in ways that creates a value/added-value for the customers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "This strategy establishes...a very distinct customer focus" • "We are and shall be a customer-oriented authority, which means that we always must consider the situation that our customers are in" • "Both our on-going work, and our improvement efforts, must be based on our customers' needs and expectations" • "As we intend to strengthen a customer-oriented approach, where we much clearer start from the ones we are here for, we must continue to talk about our 'customers'. It helps us to think about our activities and our meetings from an outside-and-in perspective" • "We must consider the customer perspective in everything we do (and refrain from doing), i.e., have an outside-and-in perspective. We should as far as possible start from the situation our customers are in and that means that we must consider what needs they have"
<p>"Beslut om kvalitetsuppföljningsmodell för Kronofogdemyndigheten"</p> <p>(2010)</p> <p>Decision on quality-monitoring model for the SEA</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic The bureaucratic logic</p> <p>This document contains elements of both logics, and this to more or less the same extent. For instance, it is stated that the authority's results should be measured based on the <i>customers' needs and requirements</i> and on <i>customer satisfaction</i>. However, there are also ways of measuring that agree with bureaucratic demands such <i>legal security</i> and <i>legal accuracy</i> and it is mentioned that the authority must maintain a "<i>citizen perspective</i>" (compared to the more business-inspired "customer perspective").</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Other quality aspects are to work with service and image" • "We must identify and work with quality based on the customers' expectations and needs" • "To us the concept of product quality means that the process is performed in a legally and formally correct way" • "The common model for quality control for the whole authority is characterized by ... that we maintain a citizen perspective, legal accuracy and legal security"

<p>"Säkerhetspolicy" (2012) Security policy</p>	<p>The bureaucratic logic This security policy is entrenched in the bureaucratic logic requiring the employees to always provide <i>correct information</i> and always <i>follow legal requirements</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The SEA's activities are dependent on that correct information can be guaranteed"
<p>"Ändrade öppettider i receptioner: frågor och svar internt" (2012) Changed opening hours for reception desks: Internal questions and answers</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic The bureaucratic logic In this document the changed opening hours are rationalized with statement both in accordance with the entrepreneurial logic and with the bureaucratic logic. Several statements are following the principle of efficiency saying that the new opening hours will <i>reduce costs</i> and <i>save resources</i>. However, the reduced opening hours are also explained in accordance with customer orientation saying that the new opening hour will lead to <i>better service</i>, that it will <i>benefit the customers</i> etc. However, the opening hours are also said to be changed so that the authority may live up to the requirements of the principle of objectivity as they will pave the way for <i>"equal treatment"</i>, <i>"equal service"</i> and <i>standardized procedures</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "It's all about getting the best possible effect to the lowest possible cost..." • "The employees must understand that when meeting a customer, we shall use the channel that facilitates for both us and the customers to get the best possible effect to the, for the authority, lowest possible cost" • "Reducing the opening hours releases resources ... and the result will be that we may use our resources more effective than today" • "This will create value for the customer" • "Routinized and a standardized treatment when meeting the customer at the reception desk..." • "By directing the unscheduled visits to our Customer service, the customers may expect equal treatment and same service regardless of where in the country they live"
<p>"Riktlinje för hantering av otillbörliga erbjudanden och otillåten påverkan" (2013) Strategy for handling of improper offers and unauthorized impact</p>	<p>The bureaucratic logic <i>A correct and objective handling of cases</i> is here highlighted as an important aim for the authority and it is stated that it is of great importance that the organization and all its employees comply with laws and regulations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The confidence in the public administration is completely dependent on that citizens, companies and organizations may trust that they will be treated objectively and legally secure" • To be employed by the SEA implies that laws as well as internal regulations must be followed" • "There can be no doubt that the employees of the SEA acts according to the current legislation and internal regulations as well as are having an ethical approach"
<p>"Riktlinje för språket" (2013) Guideline for the language</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic The employees are here urged to use a plain language and the reason that they must do so is explained to be <i>the customers' needs, the customers' rights to understand</i> and it is stated that the authority should be guided by <i>customer surveys</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The customer's needs are the starting point for our language, no matter if we speak or if we write" • "...our customers must be able to understand what we write"

<p>"Skrivhandledning" (2013) Guideline for writing</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic In this document it is stated that <i>the customer's conditions and needs</i> must govern the authority's language and writing, and the authority is urged to follow the demands inherent in customer orientation and thus move away from its habits of using "stiff technical terms".</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "It must be the customer's conditions and needs that are governing us, and our customer surveys shows that we do not reach all the way when it comes to our language"
<p>"Kronofogdens strategiska inriktning" (2013) Strategic orientation for the SEA</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic This document is dominated by the entrepreneurial logic revealed by statements saying that the authority should be considered a <i>service-provider</i>, that the aim must be to <i>create benefit for the customers</i> and to <i>strengthen the brand</i>. It is also stated that the authority should have a <i>culture of cost-awareness</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The customers' needs are our starting point. We always must ask ourselves: in what way is this better for the customer?" • "We must consider the benefit of the customer when designing solutions" • "We have a culture of cost awareness; everyone feels a responsibility to save state resources. This contributes to us making conscious choices guided by our strategies which creates an added value for the customer"
<p>"PM Strategi verkställighet" (2013) Strategy for enforcement</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic The document is dominated by the entrepreneurial logic, shown by statements such as being "<i>customer friendly</i>" or to "<i>prioritize and strengthen the brand</i>".</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Before every measure we take, even those that might seem spectacular or challenging, we make conscious choices concerning how these measures might affect our brand. When we have a chance to choose, which we almost always have, we must prioritize the measures that strengthen our brand" • "We take every chance to act so that we strengthen our brand and increase the customers' confidence in us" • "The enforcement process acts according to market terms and professionally, and we have a well-developed and customer friendly sales procedure in where seized property are transformed fast and efficiently to money"
<p>"PM Strategi skuldsanering" (2013) Strategy for debt reliefs</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic The document is unmistakably dominated by the entrepreneurial logic with statements emphasizing that the authority should <i>adapt to the customers</i>, have "<i>customer dialogues</i>" and increase <i>the benefit of the customers</i> etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "We have a well-functioning cooperation with internal as well as external stakeholders in the form of periodical customer dialogues. Moreover, we have a simple and customer adapted application procedure. We meet every customer based on their situation and needs" • "We work with customer relations..."

<p>"PM strategi konkurstillsyn"</p> <p>(2013)</p> <p>Strategy for the supervision of bankruptcies</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic</p> <p>In this document one mainly find statements in accordance with the logic of entrepreneurialism: the authority should <i>adjust to the customers' needs, know their customers and meet their expectations</i>, be modern and <i>customer oriented</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "We reach our goals by improving our customer orientation and systematically work with customer dialogues and customer satisfaction" • "The supervision of bankruptcies is handled professionally based on the customers' needs..."
<p>"PM kommunikationsstrategi"</p> <p>(2013)</p> <p>Strategy for communication</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic</p> <p>The document is evidently dominated by entrepreneurialism; it is emphasized that the authority should act to the <i>benefit of the customer</i>, have a <i>high service level, consider brand</i> etc. The authority must also become a <i>service provider</i> (instead of being an authority exerciser) and it is stated that the authority previously has had a culture that stressed accuracy instead of comprehensibility (i.e. the authority must go through a cultural change).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "We must always start from the customer's situation, condition and needs, and communicate for the benefit of the customer" • "To reach the wished future state the SEA must in all meetings with the customer always communicate to the benefit of the customer and always start from the customer's situation, condition and needs" • "We must go from being an authority exerciser to becoming a service providing authority" • "Our authority is well-known but mostly associated with collection, which often result in a prejudiced and sometimes inaccurate perception of us as a threatening and harsh authority. In accordance with the authority's brand platform we shall increase the confidence in us through the external communication, for instance media, and choose to highlight the parts of our assignment that has the biggest potential in changing the perception about us"
<p>"PM kompetensförsörjningsstrategi"</p> <p>(2013)</p> <p>Strategy for retaining a high level of competency</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic</p> <p>The entrepreneurial logic is distinctly leading in this strategy: it is here repeatedly stated that the authority should strive towards creating <i>customer benefits</i> and it is emphasized that the authority must change its <i>brand</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "To be able to meet the customers' needs we need employees with a high level of competency" • "Everybody that works at the SEA are carriers of the brand"
<p>"PM varumärkesplattform"</p> <p>(2013)</p> <p>Platform for the brand</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic</p> <p>The statements of this document are grounded in the idea the authority must change its <i>image</i> and how people think about the organization: from a harsh authority exerciser to a <i>humane service provider</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "We know that it in the customer meeting there is a chance for us to change the image of the SEA and increase the confidence in us ... based on the softer values that we want to express" • "We want to be seen as an authority that... ...have a high level of confidence ...is humane and responsive instead of harsh and authoritarian ...is a service provider at the same time as exercising authority"

<p>"Riktlinje för hantering av epost i Kronofogde-myndighetens elektronisk brevlåda"</p> <p>(2013)</p> <p>Guideline for handling email in the SEA's electronic mailbox</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic First and foremost, the document is permeated by entrepreneurialism underscoring that the authority must strive towards creating <i>benefit for the customers</i>, to <i>strengthen the brand</i> etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "A unitary and structured handling of the emails will lead to that our customers perceive us as a modern authority" • "It is a requirement from our customers to be able to communicate with us electronically"
<p>"PM strategi för summarisk process"</p> <p>(2013)</p> <p>Strategy for the summary procedure</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic Entrepreneurialism is distinctly dominating this document. Repeatedly it is emphasized how the authority must go through a cultural change from "<i>public service</i>" to "<i>customer focus</i>", and that the authority must change from being an authority exerciser to becoming a <i>service provider</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The activities are now seen as providing service and to a large degree it is about giving support and information, and to create an added-value for the customer" • "To serve someone a document is just as much about giving preventive information and activating the customer as it is about effecting the service" • "A changed corporate culture going from public servant to customer focus" • "We must start to consider ourselves as service providers" • "We have a mental picture of ourselves as service providers rather than as authority exercisers" • "We must...embrace the customer-oriented approach and let it permeate our work, especially in our contacts with the customers"
<p>"PM IT-strategi"</p> <p>(2013)</p> <p>IT-strategy</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic The document is embedded in the entrepreneurial logic. It is, for instance, stated that the authority's IT-solutions should be designed to be <i>cost-effective</i> and <i>focused on the customers</i> and the <i>benefit of the customers</i>. It is also several times emphasized that all IT-investments must be done with both <i>internal efficiency</i> and <i>customer benefits</i> in mind.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "We must have a balance in our investments between customer focused development and internal efficiency and risk" • "We must think about customer benefits when we design solutions" • "...by providing relevant services to our customer, in effective and up-to-date channels, we will be seen as a modern and customer oriented authority by our stakeholders"
<p>"PM kundmötesstrategin"</p> <p>(2013)</p> <p>Strategy for how to meet the customers</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic Unmistakably dominated by entrepreneurial demands and ideas: the importance of creating a "<i>customer culture</i>" and to become more "<i>service oriented</i>" is underscored. It is also claimed that there is a resistance towards the "<i>customer culture</i>" within the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "We are customer focused and we have a customer culture that permeates the whole organization" • "The requirements from the outside world have changed, to merely fulfil our mission as a public authority is not enough. If we want to maintain the outside

	<p>authority expressed in “the culture of the law enforcing authority”. It is once again emphasized that the authority should become a <i>service provider</i> instead of being an authority exerciser.</p>	<p>world’s confidence in the authority and fulfil the mission as our principals wishes then we must adapt and become more service-oriented. By actively using the customer-concept in everything we do we may fulfil the future requirements on the authority”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “One may question the reasonableness of using the notion of customers for those who cannot choose, or pay, for our services, then mainly the debtors. But, since we strive to strengthen a customer oriented approach in where it is clear that we start from those who we are here for, we shall continue to talk about our ‘customers’. This will help us to consider the operations from a outside-and-in perspective” • “To succeed in the meeting with the customer is just as important as producing quantity and should therefore be measured and evaluated in the same way as traditional production” • “How do we want our customers to see us? The choice is about how we want to be seen by our customers and today we can see that we are seen as bureaucratic and formal. If the customers see us as a service-provider instead of as an authority exerciser we will reach success in our meetings with our customers” • “We must meet our customers in a way that will exceed their expectations”
<p>”PM strategi förebyggande verksamhet” (2013) Strategy for proactive work</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic It is here frequently emphasized that the authority must try to be more <i>customer oriented</i> and base all its actions on <i>customer surveys</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “In the year 2018 the customers will feel that the SEA creates the added-value that is needed for the customer to handle his/her situation”
<p>”PM Kanalstrategi” (2014) Channel strategy</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic This document is dominated by the entrepreneurial logic: everything the authority does must be done from the <i>customers’ perspective</i> and based on <i>the customers’ needs</i>. The authority should also analyse the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We design our services according to the customers’ needs, as it is our customers that uses the services. Then they will be more satisfied” • “We see the human, not the case” • “We always ask ourselves: in what way is this better for the customer?”

	customers' demands for its services.	
"Riktlinje för hur vi skriver myndighetens namn" (2014) Guideline for how we write the authority's name	The entrepreneurial logic It is in this document declared that the shorter, less formal, name should be used, and this is motivated with arguments of a cultural change or "change of brand".	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "...Kronofogden is a more casual name then Kronofogdemyndigheten. Kronofogden gives a less stiff impression, which is in line with how we wish to be perceived"
"Riktlinje för Kronofogdens bemötande av barn" (2014) Guideline for the treatment of children	The bureaucratic logic In accordance with the bureaucratic logic there are numerous references to laws and regulations, legal certainty is emphasized. Moreover, the notion of "customers" is never used.	-
"Anvisning för hantering av självmordshot och dödsfall" (2014) Instruction for how to handle suicide threats and deaths	The bureaucratic logic The text is very procedural and is presenting the "correct protocol and procedures" and what measures that should be taken and when. The clients are, in this document, never referred to as "customers".	-
"Riktlinje för hantering av otillåten påverkan" (2014) Guideline for the handling of unauthorized influence	The bureaucratic logic The document is permeated by the bureaucratic logic in how it is referring to laws, legal security and emphasizing objectivity. It is underscored that things must be handled in accordance with the rules of procedure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "The confidence in the public administration is completely dependent on that citizens, companies and organizations may trust that they will be treated objectively and legally secure and that we are not affected by irrelevant wishes or considerations. According to the constitution all public authority must be exercised in the SEA this means that you must follow laws and internal rules"
"Uppförandekod för Kronofogdemyndighe ten" (2014) Code of conduct for the SEA	The bureaucratic logic Objectivity is here emphasized and legal certainty and equal treatment is said to be aspects that everyone at the SEA constantly must consider.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our customers and the rest of the world must have a confidence in that employees of the SEA are handling the cases and making the decisions objectively" "...we perform our mission in the best possible way and we protect the basic values of public administration; democracy, legal security, efficiency and service and respect"
"Riktlinje för språket inom Kronofogdemyndighe ten"	The entrepreneurial logic It is here stated that the customers' needs are what should be the number one guiding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Our customer surveys show that we do not reach all the way when it comes to our language today. This is why we must become more comprehensible... "

<p>(2014)</p> <p>Guideline for the language within the SEA</p>	<p>aspect in regard to the language the organization uses.</p>	
<p>"Riktlinje för Facebook inom Kronofogdemyndighe ten"</p> <p>(2015)</p> <p>Guideline for Facebook within the SEA</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic The bureaucratic logic The authority is here said to strive towards being seen as <i>modern</i> and <i>customer responsive</i>. Still, all posts on the Facebook-page must be handled according to the routines and <i>correct procedures</i> for public documents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The SEA wants to offer new and current customer groups a target-group adapted communication and be responsive to the customers' needs for dialogue" • "Posts and comments on the Facebookpage of the SEA are public documents and must be handled according to Decision of application of RA-FS 1997-6 (reference number XXXXX)"
<p>"Riktlinje – dokumentplan för Kronofogdemyndighe ten"</p> <p>(2015)</p> <p>Guideline – plan for documents</p>	<p>The bureaucratic logic The document is listing the internal rules for how a document should be written, formed and archived.</p>	<p>-</p>
<p>"Riktlinje för representation och gåvor inom Kronofogdemyndighe ten"</p> <p>(2015)</p> <p>Guideline for representation and gifts within the SEA</p>	<p>The bureaucratic logic The bureaucratic logic is domination this document with constant references to <i>laws</i>, <i>internal procedures</i> and rules for how to always share information to the nearest manager (correct hierarchical order) etc.</p>	<p>-</p>
<p>"Riktlinje för internkommunikation inom Kronofogdemyndighe ten"</p> <p>(2015)</p> <p>Guideline for internal communication</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic It is in the document described in how the internal communication should encourage a customer focus.</p>	<p>-</p>
<p>"Anvisning för personskydd vid förrättning"</p> <p>(2015)</p>	<p>The bureaucratic logic This text is focusing on <i>the correct procedures</i>, and often referring to <i>laws</i>. Distinct and <i>rule-focused</i> instruction.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "A mutual signal for retreat that indicates when to call off must be agreed beforehand"

<p>Instruction for personal protection during fieldwork</p>		
<p>"Riktlinje för hantering av epost i Kronofogdemyndighetens elektroniska brevlåda"</p> <p>(2015)</p> <p>Guideline for handling email in the authority's electronic mailbox</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic It is here stated that it is a <i>demand from the customers</i> to be able to communicate electronically and the authority must be a <i>modern authority</i>, and create <i>benefits for the customers</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "It is demanded from our customers to be able to communicate with us electronically" • "A unitary and structured handling of the emails contributes to our customers perceiving us as a modern authority"
<p>"Anvisning för receptions- och besöksrutiner"</p> <p>(2015)</p> <p>Instruction for reception- and visiting routines</p>	<p>The bureaucratic logic The document has a clear focus on procedures, how to handle certain situations and who that is responsible within the organization.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "In case more than one employee is representing the authority at the visit or in case the customer is accompanied by a family member, interpreter, or advisor – then the office's meeting room may be used in exceptional cases. In these cases the employee that is receiving the visits must decide whether any safety measures must be taken"
<p>"Riktlinje för hantering av otillåten påverkan inom Kronofogdemyndigheten"</p> <p>(2015)</p> <p>Guideline for the handling of unauthorized influence within the SEA</p>	<p>The bureaucratic logic The legalistic-bureaucratic logic is unmistakably dominating this document emphasizing <i>legal certainty</i> and <i>rule following</i>. Extremely procedural.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "There must be no doubt that you as an employee of the SEA is acting according to the current legislation and internal rules and is acting ethical"
<p>"Anvisning för utformning av det fysiska skyddet – Normkontoret"</p> <p>(2015)</p> <p>Instruction for how to design the physical protection – the standard office</p>	<p>The bureaucratic logic Dominated by <i>rules</i> for how to form the offices so that all reception areas will be <i>secure and similar</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "A main principle is that it must be a physical demarcation (for instance the reception desk) between customers/visitors and employees. The distance that then is created shall prevent/obstruct a potential attack on employees and give them time for retreat"
<p>"Anvisning för hantering av självmordshot och dödsfall"</p> <p>(2015)</p> <p>Instruction for how to handle suicide threats and deaths</p>	<p>The bureaucratic logic Permeated with <i>routines, internal processes</i> and <i>procedures</i>.</p>	<p>-</p>

<p>"Riktlinje för Kronofogdens bemötande av barn"</p> <p>(2015)</p> <p>Guideline for the SEA's treatment of children</p>	<p>The bureaucratic logic Full of references to <i>laws, internal procedures and legal security.</i></p>	<p>-</p>
<p>"Riktlinje för Facebook inom Kronofogdemyndighe ten"</p> <p>(2016)</p> <p>Guideline for Facebook within SEA</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic See the guideline for Facebook for 2015.</p>	<p>-</p>
<p>"Riktlinje för internkommunikation inom Kronofogdemyndighe ten"</p> <p>(2016)</p> <p>Guideline for internal communication</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic It is here stated that the internal communication is aiming at creating <i>customer value</i> and contribute to <i>customer benefit</i> etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The guideline describes how we work with internal communication to create greatest possible value for the activities and in the long run for our customers"
<p>"Arbetsordning för Kronofogdemyndighe ten"</p> <p>(2016)</p> <p>Work procedure for the SEA</p>	<p>The bureaucratic logic Primarily dominated by the bureaucratic logic by how it is emphasized that the <i>rules of procedure, the internal rules and laws</i> must guide the activities.</p>	<p>-</p>
<p>"Våra strategier"</p> <p>(2016)</p> <p>Our strategies</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic In this document it is emphasized that the authority should have a clear <i>customer focus</i> and <i>the customers' needs</i> should be the starting point for all that the authority does. At the same time a vision of the future is presented: a smaller more effective organization ("we become fewer") accomplished by a digitalization.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "We have the customers' focus" • "Our work gives our customers an added value and creates values for society" • "We can do more with less" • "We invest in digitalize and become fewer"
<p>"Policy för Kronofogdens varumärke"</p> <p>(2016)</p> <p>Policy for the SEA's brand</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic In this document a wished future state is presented: the authority as a <i>service provider</i> that is seen as <i>humane and responsive</i> instead of hard authority exerciser. This is presented as a <i>change of brand.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The wished state is that we are seen as an authority that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - is humane and responsive instead of harsh and authoritarian" • "...the softer values that we want to bring out" • We must actively try to develop and strengthen our brand"

<p>"Riktlinje för hantering av otillåten påverkan inom Kronofogdemyndigheten"</p> <p>(2017)</p> <p>Guideline for the handling of unauthorized influence within the SEA</p>	<p>The bureaucratic logic See the Guideline for the handling of unauthorized influence within the SEA from 2015.</p>	<p>-</p>
<p>"Riktlinje för språket inom Kronofogdemyndigheten"</p> <p>(2017)</p> <p>Guideline for the language within the SEA</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic In this document it is constantly referred to <i>customer surveys</i>, and <i>the customers' needs</i> must be the guiding principle for all written and spoken language at the authority.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The customer's needs must be the starting point for our language, whether we speak or write" • "We use a tone that mirrors our approach (humane and responsive)"
<p>"Uppförandekod för Kronofogdemyndigheten"</p> <p>(2017)</p> <p>Code of conduct for the SEA</p>	<p>The bureaucratic logic Primarily marked by the bureaucratic logic by emphasizing <i>legal security, objectivity and impartiality</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ...we protect the basic values of public administration; democracy, legal security, efficiency and service and respect"
<p>"Riktlinje för interkommunikation inom Kronofogdemyndigheten"</p> <p>(2017)</p> <p>Guideline for internal communication</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic The internal communication should be in accordance with the <i>needs of the customers</i> and <i>create benefit for the customers</i>.</p>	<p>-</p>
<p>"Riktlinje för Facebook inom Kronofogdemyndigheten"</p> <p>(2017)</p> <p>Guideline for Facebook within SEA</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic It is here stated that <i>the customers expect a modern authority</i> and that the authority will by its presence at Facebook be seen as more <i>modern</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ambition is that our presence there [at Facebook] will lead to that we may meet the customers' expectations on a modern authority, and give us a better chance to reach out to new target groups"
<p>"Riktlinje för kommunikation inom Kronofogdemyndigheten"</p> <p>(2018)</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic It is here emphasized that the internal communication, just as the external communication, must be built on customer focus.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "We must be seen as a modern authority with a clear customer focus"

<p>Guideline for communication within the SEA</p>		
<p>“Riktlinje för säkerhet för medarbetare inom Kronofogdemyndigheten” (2018) Safety guideline for the employees of the SEA</p>	<p>The bureaucratic logic Characterized by the bureaucratic logic with a focus on <i>internal rules and regulations</i> plus consequences of breaking these rules. Also, some focus on the <i>hierarchical decision order</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “At the SEA we must work systematically with safety issues and therefore we have a safety management system that describes rules, roles, responsibilities, and our way of working within safety” • “You as an employee have a responsibility to know and follow internal guiding documents, and observe and report safety issues to the nearest manager, safety function or IT-department” • “Not following our safety and secrecy decisions it may result in disciplinary actions”
<p>“Utvecklingsplan 2019 – 2025” (2018) Plan for development 2019 - 2025</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic In this document it is constantly emphasized that the <i>customers must be in the centre of the development</i> and that development must be planned based on <i>the customers’ needs</i>. At the same time as the digitalizing and automating will lead to <i>cost saving</i>, a so-called “digital transformation”.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We provide the customers with a chance to do the right thing from the beginning” • “We have a customer driven development” • “We need to know the customers’ needs to a much bigger extent, we tend to have too much inside-and-out thinking” • “We develop without any unnecessary costs” • We have automated everything that is possible to automatize”
<p>“Planeringsanvisning inför 2019” (2018) Planning instruction for 2019</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic Entrepreneurialism is clearly dominating: the activities of the authority are presented as a “<i>production</i>” that is guided by the <i>customers’ demands</i> and the authority is required to try to “<i>reduce waste</i>”.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “This has resulted in an increased production within many of our processes and a better ability to handle deviations...” • “We prioritize the work that creates best effect for customer” • “The production plan and the pace are built on the demand for our services” • “We remove everything that isn’t demanded or produce any kind of value”
<p>“Verksamhetsplan 2019” (2019) Operations plan for 2019</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic Dominated by the entrepreneurial logic shown in how the customers and <i>the customers’ demand</i> are constantly emphasized and by how the authority must aim to do “<i>more with less</i>”.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We deliver quality based on the customers’ needs” • “We have the customers’ focus ... and must develop a model to identify customer needs” • “We can do more with less”

<p>“Frågor och svar om nytt sätt att arbeta med utveckling – ny utvecklingsmodell”</p> <p>(2019)</p> <p>Questions and answers about a new way of working with development - a new development model</p>	<p>The entrepreneurial logic</p> <p>Mainly dominated by entrepreneurialism by how <i>the customer should be in centre</i> of the development work. Better quality and increased speed for the customer is described as the authority’s main aim.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is the customer’s needs and the teams’ knowledge that is the core of our developmental work” • (About working “agile”): “Better speed and quality in our development is one of the advantages for the customer, but the biggest advantage is that the customer and the customer’s needs is in focus within agile development just like in our work with constant improvements” • You are trained in viewing the development in a ‘outside-and-in’ perspective”
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Organizational and Individual response to hybridity in the public sector

It has become increasingly common for public organizations to gaze towards the market sector and adopt market- and business-inspired elements. The situation when public organizations adopt elements from the market sector may be considered as *organizational hybridity*. The fact that many public organizations hybridize raises the question of how the public organizations, and the individuals working at the frontline of public organizations, are managing the demands of market-inspired elements, in a public setting and alongside the traditional demands of public administration. This dissertation explores the organizational and individual response to hybridity in the public sector through a case study of the Swedish Enforcement Authority (SEA). The SEA is well-suited as a case organization since it is a public organization that has adopted the market-inspired concept of *customer orientation* as a prioritized organizational approach.

The organizational response to hybridity identified in the dissertation is a procedure of emphasizing and downplaying different demands depending on context and topic. This way public organizations adopting market-inspired elements may avoid confrontations between the demands of market-inspired elements and the traditional demands of public administration. Furthermore, the dissertation reveals that frontline public servants tend to hold on to a professional identity strictly based on the traditional values of public administration. As a result, many frontline public servants perceive that market-related demands conflict with their view on their work and their duties, and they respond to hybridity by ignoring or even resisting the demands of market-inspired elements. Accordingly, the dissertation indicates that tensions associated with organizational hybridity in the public sector might be unobtrusive, and only detected when viewed from the perspective of the individuals working at the frontline of public organizations.

Henrik Edlund has been working as an enforcement officer at the Swedish Enforcement Authority (Kronofogdemyndigheten) since 2009. He holds a master's degree in political science from Örebro University. "Organizational and Individual response to hybridity in the public sector" is his doctoral dissertation.

