Differences in organizational preconditions for managers in genderized municipal services

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ABSTRACT

In contrast to much research concerned with differences in male and female managers' leadership strategies, this study focuses on how organizational arrangements vary for managers in differently genderized contexts; it explores the opportunities for frontline managers in municipal services to fulfil their assignment. The organisational preconditions for over 400 managers of municipal health and social care, education and technical services are analysed in a cross-level and comparative research design. The results indicate that managers of feminized care services work in an environment with fewer resources, less organisational support and larger spans of control, than managers in masculinized municipal services. These results shed light on meso-level mechanisms involved in the unequal distribution of health risks among men and women in working life.

1. Introduction

Public sector organizations in democratic welfare states have gone through a large transformation during the last decades with implications for power relations and gender equality (Conley, Kerfoot & Thornley, 2011). The precedence of contract over hierarchy, private sector style management, performance measurement and output control, organizational disaggregation, and incentives to increase competition and efficiency in the public sector are some of the key components of the New Public Management (Hood, 1991). This is a management paradigm that has been accused for devaluating the public sector as an employer, reducing the professional autonomy, and increasing work environment problems and gender inequality (Ashcraft, 2013; Davies & Thomas, 2002; Rasmussen, 2004). Before the mid-1960s and the large expansion of caring services, the Swedish public sector was dominated by male workers. Human services like education and health care were for a long period characterized by good working conditions with almost no gender differences in for example occupational health and sick leave rates. In a national health survey from 1990, teaching and nursing were ranked as the healthiest

occupations for women (Stockholm County Council, 1991). This situation changed in the late 1980s (Angelov, Johansson, Lindahl & Lindström, 2011). Today, employees in occupations which imply regular contact with other human beings have an increased risk for sick leave in psychiatric diagnoses (The Swedish Social Insurance Agency, 2014). Many explanations have been suggested often with a focus on women and the double burden of paid and unpaid work (see e.g. Angelov et al., 2011). However, it is becoming increasingly recognized that explanations to gender differences in sick leave rates instead should be sought in the way work is organized in female and male dominated occupations, sectors and industries (Albin, Toomingas & Bodin, 2016; Härenstam, 2009; SSIA, 2014, Sverke, Falkenberg, Kecklund, Magnusson Hanson & Lindfors, 2016; Theorell et al., 2015; Östlin, Danielsson, Diderichsen, Härenstam & Lindberg, 2001).

To organize public services and attract qualified employees, with decreasing resources and an aging population, is a challenge across Europe. Public sector managers are responsible for translating and implementing laws, regulations, and local level decisions in the operation. They are accountable for the work environment of the employees, as well as for the organizational performance. This motivates an investigation into the opportunities public sector managers have to fulfil their assignment. Management and leadership researchers are often keen to scrutinize the virtues, skills and strategies of great leaders, who cope with challenges and turn their companies, schools and

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hospitals into successful organizations. As a response to this emphasis on the individual, influential scholars have called for a less individualistic view that recognizes the national, sectorial and organizational influences on managerial work practices (Nordengraaf & Stewart, 2000; Mintzberg, 2006; Dierdorff, Rubin & Morgeson, 2009; Morgeson, 2012). They claim that it is important to consider the possibilities and constraints that are embedded in the *context* where managers operate. Scholars that take their point of departure from the managerial *practice* tend to view managerial work as interactive and situated phenomena, highly embedded in context and dependent on situation (Tengblad and Vie, 2012). The public sector is generally associated with standardized and well-designed structures governed by the values of collegiality, equity and transparency- classic traits of the bureaucracy. Such ideal types of organizations are supposed to have a clear delegation of authority, clear job descriptions and principles for rewards. As government institutions, they are expected to live up to gender equality policies. Still, many bureaucracies have a gendered disposition in relation to recruitment, roles, access to resources, and membership of networks due to the traditional exclusions of women and women's experiences (Annesley & Gains, 2010).

Together with its Scandinavian neighbours, Sweden tends to take on lead positions in international gender equality rankings— for example, for the past ten years Sweden never dropped below the fourth position in the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index, covering aspects of women and men's economic and political participation, education attainment and health (WEF, 2015). Yet, gender inequality still persists in Sweden, as well as in the other Scandinavian countries. For example, Swedish women still use the majority of days for parental allowance, they still work part time to a larger extent than men, sex differences in pay are almost unchanged since the 1980s and men have higher pensions (Statistics Sweden, 2014). Universal state-funded child allowances, parental leave, and child care, are social policy cornerstones which support female labour force participation and enable both women and men to reconcile work and family in the Nordic countries (Esping-Andersen, 1999; Ferrarini, 2003). Such family policies were the late-comers to the elaborate Nordic welfare state programs, and a dual earner model including women from all social classes was not realized in the Nordic countries until the 1960–1970's (Nousiainen, 2000). In 2013, women's labour force participation was higher in Sweden (91% in the age group 25–44, and 84% in the group 45–64) than in any other part of the world (Statistics Sweden, 2014). Yet, the dual earner model came to the price of a highly gender segregated labour market, with female- and male-dominated sectors and occupations (cf. Martin, 2011). Among the 30 largest occupations in Sweden, only three have an equal sex distribution (i.e 40–60% of each sex), namely chefs/cooks, doctors and university/higher education teachers. Sectors are also horizontally segregated in Sweden: women make up 77% of the employees in municipalities, 78% in county councils, while the central government sector and the private sector are more integrated (with 51 and 39% women respectively) (ibid). One possible explanation to the strong horizontal gender segregation in the Nordic labour markets might be that when the welfare services expanded during the 1970s, they were manned mainly by women and organized according to patriarchal principles (Gonäs, Johansson, & Svärd 1996; Walby, 1990). Part-time schedules and standardized job descriptions facilitated exchangeability when the woman was needed to take care of her own children. These organizational principles still characterize caring services in Sweden. While there has been a trend towards occupational gender desegregation in Scandinavia for the past 20 years, the gender segregation remains intact at the sectorial level (Ellingsæter, 2014). Consequently, changes and developments in the Swedish municipalities and county councils predominantly

affect women. Decreasing resources and new forms of government have been suggested to explain the increased work load and decreased professional autonomy reported in studies of public sector organizations in the Nordic countries (Rasmussen, 2004; Westerberg & Armelius, 2000). Increasing sick leave rates, particularly due to stress-related health problems in the human service sector are currently up for discussion at the national level in Sweden (SWEA, 2014a,b; Albin et al., 2016). To meet these challenges, more knowledge is needed about the workplace level mechanisms, which link macro-level phenomena (such as labour market gender segregation and sector specific changes of management technologies and organizing), to working conditions and work- related health. Could it be that feminized services are organized differently than masculinized types of services? Few studies have compared organizational conditions across gender-ized public sector domains. The public sector in Sweden is horizontally gender segregated and thus suitable for testing the idea that gender 'rubs off' not only on work activities and occupations (Ashcraft 2013; Britton, 2000; Cockburn, 1988), but also on organizational structures and arrangements. For example: is there less autonomy, less organizational support and less goal clarity in feminized caring service as compared to masculinized technical services? If differences are found, such knowledge would contribute to understand the mechanisms behind high work load and work-related health problems in feminized public services.

The specific aim of this study is to investigate whether there are systematic differences in organizational conditions for managers in genderized local government services. The overall objective is to get a deeper insight into how power and resources are allocated in local government organizations and how this follows gender lines. Just comparing the number of women and men in managerial positions in organization and management research would not advance our understanding of gender inequality (Britton, 2000). With genderized services, we refer not only to the sex composition of the staff, but also to the fact that gender can "rub off" on work tasks, occupations, organizations, services and entire sectors on the labour market (Britton 2000; Cockburn 1988). Most gender and work studies either use occupation or organization as the analytical unit. We suggest that type of service is an under-researched analytical level when exploring gender inequalities in the labour market. The work object (Kohn & Schooler, 1983), the technology used to work on this object (Thompson, 1967) and the rationales, organizational cultures and structures, policies and legal arrangements which regulate action are all related to each other within a specific service (such as caring), which are separated from the work objects, technologies, rationales and regulations of other types of services (such as water supply and education). We suggest that the horizontal gender segregation and the gender labelling of different types of services is even more stable over time than the gender segregation and gender labelling of occupations (cf. Ellingsæter, 2014). The spatial and functional separation between women and men, and between what is labelled as feminine and masculine is according to scholars like Acker, (1990); Hirdman (1990); Lindgren (1988); Ridgeway (2013) and Tilly (1998) the basic mechanism for the creation of inequalities in women and men's access to power and resources, status and control in working life.

A theoretically grounded survey instrument (The Gothenburg Manager Stress Inventory, GMSI, Eklöf, Pousette, Dellve, Skagert, & Ahlborg., 2010) is applied on a large number of managers in a strategically and theoretically selected sample of Swedish local government organizations. With its gender segregated labour market and a large public sector, Sweden constitutes an adequate case for comparing genderized public services. The study draws on the previous work by Westerberg and Armelius (2000) who showed that psychosocial working conditions and psychosomatic

complaints differed systematically between male and female dominated municipal services, as well as between male and female managers. In the gender-integrated education services, no differences between male and female managers were found. The study showed that organization affiliation accounted for more variance in psychosocial working conditions than the managers' individual sex. It also draws on the work of Forsberg Kankkunen (2014) who showed that both male and female health care managers had less access to hierarchical networks of communication within their organizations, than male and female technical managers. As a consequence, managers of the feminized services had fewer opportunities to obtain important resources such as support, information, recognition and control than managers of the technical services. Together, these findings suggest that the esteemed position of being a manager can also be an exposed and powerless one, depending on how the service is genderized (Andersson & Tengblad, 2009; Britton 2000). Through a systematic examination of various organizational conditions that have been proven to be vital for public sector managers, this study will further explore the assumption that local government managers are not managing on equal terms.

2. Contextualizing gender in organization studies

Gender scholars have, since the 1970s, argued for a structural approach to understand how gender is embedded in the very way work is organized (Acker, 1990, 1992, 1999, 2006; Britton, 2000; Kanter, 1977). They have argued that power and resources are distributed along gender lines in the on-going processes of constructing and conceptualizing organizational arrangements. Gendered organizations are, according to Acker's definition (1990, p.146), not only a matter of bodily segregation and numbers; they also involve unequal allocations of rewards, status, power and control. Women and men tend to assemble in distinct occupations and sectors, and feminized (and probably, but not necessarily, female dominated) work activities and tasks tend to entail less recognition in terms of hierarchical position, wage and status (Ridgeway, 1997). A substantial body of research has asked for more contextualized focus in research on gender and work by exploring how gender is enacted in social contexts and thus also possible to change (Martin, 2011; Yoder & Kahn, 2003). These contexts are found in all levels of society where social interactions occur and social practices are developed. In her seminal work, Kanter (1977) investigated how the power relations that horizontally and vertically separate women and men are created and maintained in organizations. To Kanter, women's organizational experiences are associated with disadvantageous positions in organizational structures, not with specific female behaviours or traits. This structural approach invited scholars to view gender as a central organizing feature of social life, an axis of power. Acker (1990) suggest that the gendering processes of organizations can be accessed from different analytical points of entry. One way is to expose how the mundane day-to-day procedures and activities that take place in organizations result in divisions along gender lines; women and men are, to a large extent, found in different sectors, positions and occupations, and the male domains are systematically better off in terms of reward, acknowledgement, status, power and control. While the lines that divide male and female work are relocated over time and in different places, the division is in itself robust. Another gendering process suggested by Acker is the on-going practice of creating and conceptualizing the organizational structure. For example, the bureaucratic way of organizing work has been criticized for building on values and practices that neglect women's experiences (Acker, 1990; Ferguson, 1984; Ve, 1982; Wærness, 1984). Work with human beings – traditionally female activities – requires sensitivity to the

situation and a considerable amount of flexibility. When care work became an object for organization in the public sphere, it was framed in instrumental, goal-oriented and standardized models of organization, in which the particularities of the rationality of caring were neglected (Wærness, 1984). In the past decades, under the New Public Management, this frame has been accentuated (Hood, 1991; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011) and this may be one explanation to the increased work strain and work related psychosocial illness in the traditional female sectors (Aronsson and Gustafsson, 2005; Conley, Keerfoot & Thornley 2011; Rasmussen 2004; SWEA, 2014a,b). It has been suggested that the combination of decentralization of management accountability and the increased pressure to adapt to centralized targets and key indicators for result measurement has been particularly hazardous for equality initiatives since these cannot compete with the more forcing 'hard' performance targets (Conley et al., 2011).

It is through the internal processes of organizations that gender inequalities are created, sustained and transformed, and the meso-level of the organization thus comes to the fore as the other appropriate level of analysis. Because the focus of this paper is the organizational conditions for managerial work in the public sector, we will next specify which organizational factors are important for this specific population.

3. Aspects of organizational context

Organizations are important means of social stratification (Barley and Kunda, 2001; Lounsbury & Ventresca, 2003; Tilly and Tilly, 1998). In order to understand how power and resources are distributed in working life, general patterns of inequality and structural conditions in organizations must be put in focus. The theory of gendered organizations suggests that it is via the internal structural arrangements of organizations that inequalities are created, sustained, and transformed (Acker, 1990). A comparative contextual approach has been suggested to identify agents, structures and processes in social contexts that can either maximize or minimize gender differences (Yoder & Kahn, 2003). Managers do undoubtedly implement different formal and informal strategies to gain influence and power in their organizations. In contrast to many other studies on female and male leadership strategies however, we are interested in whether organizational arrangements such as routines for communication, managerial assignment, and resource allocation differ between clusters of organizations in differently genderized services.

Johns (2006) provides a generic framework for contextualizing organizational research. He defines context as the "situational opportunities and constraints that affect the occurrence and meaning of organizational behaviour" (p. 386), and distinguishes two levels of context. Occupation is a central element at the *omnibus* level, while task and social context are central aspects at the *discrete* level. Knowledge of someone's occupation constitutes a solid basis for making inferences about the social context (for example, the demographic composition of the occupation) and about the task context (for example, the level of discretion in the occupation). The social and task contexts in turn explain a large part of a person's organizational behaviour. The effects of occupation on organizational behaviour are *mediated* through the discrete context.

Johns (ibid.) discusses uncertainty, autonomy, accountability and resources as important aspects of the task context. In the public sector, uncertainty many times stem from the numerous stakeholders who are involved in service production. Politicians, strategic level managers, staff, citizens and support functions are all interested in having a say in the planning, production and control of public services. The ability to cope with these demands has been shown to be of utmost importance for managers in public

sector organizations (Bernin, 2002; Berntsson, Wallin & Härenstam, 2012; Dellve & Wikström, 2009; Eklöf et al., 2010; Forsberg Kankkunen, 2014; Westerberg & Armelius, 2000). Many times, frontline and middle managers must act like 'shock absorbers' and buffer between the strategic management and the operating staff (Skagert, Dellve, Eklöf, Pousette, & Ahlborg, 2008; Westerberg, 2001). They are responsible for goal implementation, for leading and organizing work, and for ensuring service quality. When the interests of politicians of different wings, staff members and service clients must be met, there is a risk of conflicts. In order for lower-level managers to be able to fulfil this broad variety of tasks, they need clarity in goals, assignments and responsibility, as well as access to the necessary material, personnel and organizational resources (Eklöf et al., 2010). It is also important to be adequately rewarded (Pousette, 2001). Very often, public sector managers have a professional background, which trains them to exercise substantial discretion in interpreting and implementing goals (Ivarsson-Westerberg, 2011). It is obvious that there is an interconnection between uncertainty, accountability, autonomy and resources that characterize the task context of public sector organizations.

Another facet of context involves the elements that govern human relationships in an organization. Johns (2006) mentions social density and social structure as important elements of the social context. Public sector managers must be generalists and communicate with higher-level officials as well as with employees and service users. In order to do so, they must have access to formal and informal arenas for communication (Forsberg Kankkunen, 2014; Skagert et al., 2008). Good social relations at work have been shown to be an important psychosocial prerequisite for managers' health and leadership (Lundquist, 2013). Another study has shown that the larger the number of subordinates, the higher the job demands for municipal frontline managers (Wallin, Pousette & Dellve, 2013).

If we do not have knowledge about the active mechanisms *behind* the gender differences in work related health we see in the public sector work force, it is difficult to build resilient and sustainable organizational structures that can counteract the inequalities in health. One way of contextualizing organizational research, suggested by Rousseau and Fried (2001) and Johns (2006), is to use cross-level and/or comparative designs. A cross-level design explicitly demonstrates how higher level situational factors affect lower level factors (or the other way around, which is less common). A cross-level design is comparative when situations that differ in important aspects are intentionally contrasted. Comparative designs are used when cases which are supposed to manifest the mechanisms the researcher wishes to reveal, but which are different in other aspects, are compared (Danermark, Ekström, Jakobsen & Karlsson, 2002). The organizations under study here are equal in the sense that they are all local government organizations, but they have been strategically selected to represent differently genderized services.

4. Research setting

The aim of this study requires an organizational setting that is homogenous enough to make meaningful comparisons between the different parts of the sector. It also requires that the organizational setting is heterogeneous enough in terms of genderized services. The local government sector fulfils these two criteria. National regulations to a large extent precondition the formal organization (e.g. division of authority and work tasks) of municipalities. However, the specific service departments are also regulated by particular rules and subject to different agencies of state control. Women and men tend to be clustered in separate municipal services. Each service constitutes a delimited authority

with its own accountable manager, governing regulations and budget.

Swedish local governments are responsible for a variety of public services, such as caring for old and disabled people, social care, education, urban planning, waste disposal and leisure. They operate within a common institutional setting, in that they are subject to common national legislation and governed by a political assembly at the local level. But, they differ in activities and work objectives, and are subject to different legislative acts and audit authorities, as well as to different political committees at the local level.

The municipal school system comprises pre-school, comprehensive school, upper secondary school, Swedish language for immigrants, schools for children with learning disabilities, and continuing education for adults. The Education Act provides the overarching objectives and organizational and financial rules. National statistics show that 91% of early childhood educators, 79% of primary school teachers, and 50% of secondary education teachers are women (Statistics Sweden, 2013b). These numbers have been quite stable over time (Lindvert, 1997). The pattern is that the required level of education increases with the children's age, and the proportion of male teachers increases as well.

Local health and social services agencies are responsible for providing care and support to citizens in need, and the Social Services Act regulates their activities. A period of elder care sector expansion during the 1960s and 1970s was possible due to access to cheap labour in the form of middle-aged housewives. It is still today a heavily female-dominated sector. Within municipal elder care, 91% of the nursing associate professionals and geriatric nurses are women (Statistics Sweden, 2013b). Within municipal services for the disabled, 86% of the personal care workers are women.

Whereas activities like urban planning, waste disposal, water supply and sewage treatment, housing and public transport are typically male-dominated services, municipal technical service departments can also include female-dominated activities, such as cleaning and cooking. At the national level, municipal garbage and recycling collectors and service engineers consist of 13 and 9% women, respectively, whereas 93% of the municipal kitchen assistants are women.

On the basis of this overview, we can conclude that the municipal activities of education, health and social care, and technical services are indeed differently genderized services. At the sector level, technical services are typically masculinized and male-dominated services. Teaching is the most gender-integrated occupation at the sector level. However, the younger the children, the more women are employed in educational services. Finally, the municipal health and social care services are traditionally feminized and female-dominated activities.

5. Method

5.1. Participants and procedure

We selected all the departments of health and social care, education and technical services in two small, two medium-sized municipalities, and three district administrations of two larger cities in West Sweden. In order to verify sample representativeness, we collected organizational information (such as gender composition and the level of education among the staff members) with the help of organization representatives (e.g., controllers, HRM specialists, or chief administrative officers). Men were only slightly over-represented in our sample of organizations; while the Swedish local government sector consists of 20% male employees (Statistics Sweden, 2013a), the average proportion of men in the sampled organizations was 26%. The average proportion of women
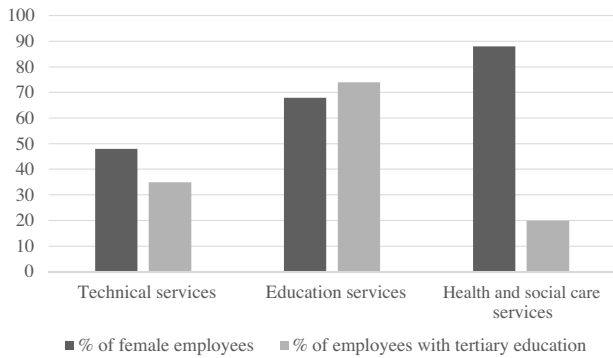
Fig. 1. Proportions of female employees and employees with tertiary education per type of service.

in the selected departments was 88% in the health and social care authorities, 68% in the educational service organizations, and 48% in the technical service organizations. We know from fieldwork that the included technical services mainly consisted of typically masculinized services, such as waste disposal, water supply and sewage treatment. The sex composition of each type of service is displayed in Fig. 1, together with the proportion of staff with tertiary education in each service.

At the individual level, all managers with operational, budgetary and staff responsibilities in the selected organizations were sampled for a survey study. The GMSI questionnaire, based on the results from preceding qualitative work on managers' working conditions and health (see, for example, Dellve & Wikström, 2009; Skagert et al., 2008) was distributed to the managers in spring 2011. The questionnaire was approved by the regional ethical committee of Gothenburg, Sweden (Dnr 048-09). The questionnaires were sent to the workplaces by mail, distributed by an appointed service officer to the individual managers, and then returned to the researchers in sealed envelopes. The response rate was 66%, which generated a sample of 491 managers. In order to reduce variation due to differences between positions, we selected operations managers, that is, first-line and middle managers. We excluded department heads and senior administrative officers from the analysis. The final sample consists of 419 operational managers, 72% of whom are female. Of the final sample, 81% were first-line managers and 19% middle managers.

5.2. Measures

The operationalization of organizational conditions was inspired by Johns' (2006) theoretical work. The measures were classified using his categories of task and social context variables (see Table 1). Task context variables are measures of Autonomy, Accountability (e.g., Clarity in authority and responsibility), Uncertainty (e.g., Organizational gap, Conflicting rationales), and Resources (e.g., Resource deficits, Administrative and advisory support). Social context variables are social density (i.e. Span of control) and Communication. The basic idea was to measure aspects of the organizational structures that would reflect how influence and control are allocated in genderized services.

The items used for comparison are individual level survey data, but often refer to the respondent's organizational experiences, rather than to individual attitudes or perceptions. For example, we do not ask managers whether they feel they have enough administrative support to fulfil their assignment; we just ask whether they have access to administrative support. Under each variable name, the question and response alternatives are reported.

Table 1
Operationalization of organizational context.

Johns' (2006) discrete context categories		Measures in present study
Task context	Autonomy	Difficult to work according to own assessments
		Difficult to realize own ideas
	Accountability	Clarity in authority
		Clarity in responsibility
		Task clarity
	Uncertainty	Organizational gap
		Conflicting rationales
	Resources	Resource deficits
		Administrative support
		Advisory support from superiors
		Advisory support from colleagues
		Advisory support from expert functions
		Career prospects
		Wages and benefits
		Organizational capacity to perform
Social context	Social density	Span of control
	Communication	Meeting content
		Meeting participation
		Meeting frequency
		Meeting attendance

5.3. Task context variables

5.3.1. Autonomy

We asked the managers '*How often does it occur in your work as a manager . . .*' followed by '*. . . that you because of decisions of superiors, politicians and government agencies cannot work according to your own assessments*' and '*. . . .that you have few opportunities to realize your own ideas about the activities you lead*'. Responses to the two items ranged from 1 (*Never/almost never)* to 5 (*Always/almost always)*. We named the first item Difficult to work according to my own assessments and the second Difficult to realize my own ideas.

5.3.2. Accountability

Answers to the two propositions '*The authority that I have as a manager is clear*' and '*My responsibilities and mission as a manager are clear and delimited*' ranged from 1 (*I definitely do not concur*) to 5 (*I definitely concur)*. We named the first item Clarity in authority and the second Clarity in responsibility.

The item '*To what extent does your work contain tasks that are unclear or difficult to interpret?*' was followed by the following response alternatives: '*Almost never*'; '*To some extent*' and '*To a large extent*'. We named this dimension Task clarity.

5.3.3. Uncertainty

Answers to the '*How often has it occurred in your work as a manager that decisions taken at the higher levels of the organization are very difficult or impossible to implement in your operation?*' ranged from 1 (*Never/almost never)* to 5 (*Always/almost always)*. A high score on this question would indicate a gap between the strategic and the operational management level, we call the measure Organizational gap.

Five items ($\alpha = 0.90$) were used to gauge the fact that public managers are often bound to follow different rationales stemming from the many stakeholders of a public administration. Sometimes, these rationales clash. The question '*If you consider the past six months, how often has the following occurred in your work as a manager . . .*' was followed by, for example, '*. . . that situations arise when you feel that you need to do many things at the same time?*' and '*. . . that there is friction between administrative work, development activities and the contact with staff members?*'.

Answers ranged from 1 (*Never/almost never)* to 5 (*Always/almost always*). The scale was called Conflicting rationales.

5.3.4. Resources

One stressor that was identified in the GMSI (Eklöf et al., 2010) was the feeling of entrapment in a situation of insufficient resources and swelling service demands. The dimension *resource deficits* (α = 0.84) was captured in a scale with six items that refer to the possibilities managers have to influence resource allocation and to handle workload peaks and imbalances of service quality demands and resources. The question '*How often has the following occurred in your work as a manager?*' was followed by items such as '*Your operation has no resources to manage workload peaks*' and '*Quality standards are so high you have trouble providing service to all users*'. Responses ranged from 1 (*Never/almost never*) to 5 (*Always/almost always*). The scale was called Resource deficits.

In order to gauge the managers' access to administrative support the answers to the question '*Do you have access to administrative support?*' were categorized into the three groups: '*No, not at all*'; '*Yes, part time*' and '*Yes, full time*'.

The managers were asked to evaluate how well their own work situation corresponded to three propositions: '*I have sufficient opportunities to discuss and reason about the operation with my superiors*'; '*I have good opportunities to discuss and reason about the operation with managers at my own level*' and '*I have sufficient opportunities to discuss and reason about the operation with external expertise functions, (i.e., experts external to my own department)*'. The answers to these three items ranged from 1 (*I definitely do not concur*) to 5 (*I definitely concur*). The items represent three aspects of advisory support: Advisory support from superiors; Advisory support from colleagues and Advisory support from expert functions. The answers to the propositions: '*I work in an organization that provides opportunities for advancement for employees*' and '*I work in an organization that provides high wages and good benefits*' ranged from 1 (*I definitely do not concur*) to 5 (*I definitely concur*). The first aspect of *Reward* refers to Career prospects (i.e for the employees) and the second to Wages and benefits.

Respondents were asked to respond to a series of questions on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*to a large extent*): '*Overall, are you satisfied with the opportunities to safely and satisfactorily fulfil your responsibility for . . .* ' followed by for example '*budgetary work*'; '*the long-term planning and development of the operation*', '*work environment standards*'. Further, they were asked to rate the answer to the question '*At your workplace, can you work so that you are pleased with the results?*' on a scale from 1 (*no, not at all*) to 4 (*to a large extent*) (Härenstam, 1989). By asking about the opportunities to fulfil managerial requirements and referring to the workplace, the questions were designed to refer to the *context*, not to individual characteristics such as managers' competence, experience or skill. We called the resulting nine-item scale (α = 0.85) the Organizational capacity to perform (OCAP) (see Björk, Szücs, & Härenstam, 2014 for its development).

5.4. Social context variables

5.4.1. Social density

Answers to the survey question '*How many subordinates are under your command?*', i.e the Span of control, ranged from 1 to 150. Answers were categorized into four groups, using the quartiles as cut-points: *Small* (1-16), *Small/Medium* (17–27); *Medium/Large* (28–35) and *Large* (>35).

5.4.2. Communication

Managers' access to networks of communication between organizational levels is vital for their opportunities to obtain important job resources such as support, information, recognition and control. Previous findings show that middle managers in feminized, caring occupations do not have the same access to such networks as managers of masculinized, technical occupations (Forsberg Kankkunen, 2014). We asked four questions to capture the flow and quality of communication between levels in the organizational hierarchy:

(a) Meeting frequency: '*Are there regular management meetings which you attend?*' The original six categories were collapsed into four groups: 2 (*Yes, every week*); 1 (*Yes, every second week*); 0 (*Once or less than once every month*).
(b) Meeting attendance: '*Who are attending these management meetings?*' Managers who reported that only managers at the same organizational level attend meeting were given the value of 0, while managers who attend meetings with managers from at least two different organizational levels were coded as 1.
(c) Meeting content: '*How are those meetings best characterized when it comes to the issues discussed?*' Managers who stated that either budgetary issues (financial planning and follow-up, retrenchments) or operational issues (service quality, planning, development, staff, and work environment) take up disproportionate time in meetings were coded as 0, whereas managers who claimed that budgetary and operational issues are equally discussed were coded as 1.
(d) Meeting participation: '*How are those meetings best characterized when it comes to communication?*' Managers that stated that meetings were characterized by dialogue between parties were given the value of 1, whereas managers that answered that meetings were characterized by either 'Top-down' information or 'Bottom-up' information were given the value of 0.

5.5. Analytical strategy

In order to explore whether there are significant differences in the conceptions of organizational conditions between managers in differently genderized types of services, a series of bivariate analyses were carried out. Health and social care service was split into care of disabled and elder care (both feminized services). Education was split into pre-school/primary school (a feminized service) and upper secondary school (a gender-integrated service). Type of service was thus a nominal factor with five levels: care of disabled, elder care, pre-school/primary school, upper secondary school and technical services (a masculinized service).

Among the criterion variables, seven were discrete and fourteen were continuous variables. A series of one-way between-group analysis of variance were conducted to test for differences in mean ratings of the continuous variables between managers in different types of operation. The *F*-test compares the between-groups estimated variance (i.e., explained variance) with the within-groups estimated variance (i.e., error variance) by dividing the former with the latter. The effect size (Eta squared) was calculated as the ratio between sum of squares between-groups and the total sum of squares. Post-hoc comparisons (Bonferroni) were conducted to indicate which groups deviated from each other in the outcome variables.

Also, Chi-square tests for independence were conducted to explore the association between type of service and the categorical variables. The Chi-square test compares the observed frequencies of cases in each category with those expected if there were no differences. The *p*-value indicates the level of significance at or below 0.05, meaning that the finding is unlikely to be due to

chance. Cramer's V was used as a measure of effect size. The chi-square statistics are reported in Table 3. IBM SPSS Statistics 22 was used for calculations.

6. Results

The analyses of variance explore the impact of type of service on levels of Autonomy, Accountability (except for Task clarity), Uncertainty and Resources (except for Administrative support) in this sample of municipal first-line and middle managers. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 2. The results from the Chi-square tests are presented in Table 3, and reveal the association between type of service and Task clarity, Span of control and patterns of Communication among the managers.

6.1. Autonomy

There was no significant difference between managers of different services in how often they feel they are hindered in their work due to decisions from superiors, politicians and government agencies (the higher the mean value, the bigger the difficulties). Post-hoc analysis also failed to find any significant difference between each pair of municipal services concerning the managers' opportunities to realize their own ideas about their operation, although the overall F ratio was significant (F = 2.57 (4, 407), p = 0.037), with managers of care service and secondary school reporting greater difficulties than managers of pre and primary school and technical services. In all, we found little evidence for any relevant difference in autonomy among managers of different municipal services.

6.2. Accountability

Managers of technical services to a greater extent reported that the authority they have as managers is clear (m = 3.76) than managers who are involved in caring for disabled people (m = 3.14). Also, technical managers seem to have a clearer view of their responsibilities (m = 3.76), than managers of pre and primary school services (m = 3.17) and care managers (m = 3.02). Yet, it should be noticed that the effect sizes are quite small (Eta squared = 0.02 and 0.04 respectively). When it comes to task clarity, only one fourth of all care managers agree to the statement that their work almost never contain tasks which are unclear and difficult to interpret, while the same goes for over half of the technical managers.

6.3. Uncertainty

Technical managers less often feel that decisions taken at the higher levels of the organization are very difficult or impossible to implement in the operation, compared to the other groups of managers. When Organizational gap is compared across the pairs of groups, there is one significant difference, that between technical managers (m = 3.36) and pre and primary school managers (m = 2.51). Technical managers also report a smaller degree of Conflicting rationales at work (m = 3.51), than managers involved in caring for disabled people (m = 3.93).

6.4. Resources

The impact of type of service is quite high when it comes to the degree of Resource deficits the managers report. Type of service

Table 2
Impact of type of operation on the task context variables.

Variables	Total M (SD) (CFI 95%)	Type of municipal operation					F (df), p	Eta squared	Post hoc test (Bonferroni)
		I. Care of disabled n = 107–109 M (SD)	II. Pre and primary school n = 108–113 M (SD)	III. Secondary school n = 39–41 M (SD)	IV. Technical services n = 77–78 M (SD)	V. Elderly care n = 75–76 M (SD)			
Difficult to work according to own assessment	2.85 (0.97) (2.76–2.94)	2.77 (0.82)	2.96 (0.97)	3.13 (0.80)	2.69 (0.88)	2.84 (0.98)	2.17 (4,407), 0.072	–	–
Difficult to realize own ideas	2.67 (0.89) (2.59–2.76)	2.76 (0,89)	2.57 (0.84)	2.77 (0.87)	2.47 (0.91)	2.85(0.91)	2.57 (4, 407), 0.037	0.02	–
Clarity in authority	3.42 (1.02) (3.32–3.52)	3.14 (1.12)	3.47(0.95)	3.32 (1.01)	3.76 (0.93)	3.45 (0.99)	4.46 (4, 409), 0.002	0.04	IV > I
Clarity in responsibility	3.29 (1.06) (3.18–3.39)	3.02 (1.10)	3.17 (1.07)	3.24 (1.02)	3.76 (0.87)	3.37 (1.04)	6.35 (4, 407), 0.000	0.06	IV > I,II
Organizational gap	2.63 (0.76) (2.56–2.70)	2.66 (0.79)	2.71 (0.73)	2.70 (0.82)	2.36 (0.72)	2.71 (0.75)	3.00 (4, 412), 0.02	0,04	IV < II
Conflicting rationales	3.78 (0.78) (3.70–3.85)	3.93 (0.73)	3.82 (0.80)	3.84 (0.79)	3.51 (0.82)	3.73 (0.73)	3.58 (4, 409), 0.007	0,03	IV < I
Resource deficits	3.09 (0.74) (3.02–3.17)	2.96 (0.66)	3.36 (0.67)	3.42 (0.75)	2.71 (0.81)	3.09 (0.65)	13.03 (4,408) 0.000	0,11	I < II I < III IV < II,III,V
Advisory support from superiors	3.55 (1.07) (3.44–3.65)	3.31 (1.04)	3.38 (1.02)	3.73 (1.07)	3.97 (1.00)	3.60 (1.11)	5.76 (4, 408), 0.000	0,05	IV > I,II
Advisory support from colleagues	4.05 (0.96) (3.96–4.14)	4.02 (0.95)	4.16 (0.92)	3.90 (0.92)	3.97 (0.98)	4.09 (1.03)	0.80 (4, 408), 0.523	–	–
Advisory support from expert functions	2.68 (1.14) (2.57–2.79)	2.37 (1.05)	2.77 (1.14), 111	2.50 (1.11), 40	3.25 (1.11), 77	2.52 (1.12), 75	8.00 (4, 408), 0.000	0,07	IV > I,II,III,V
Career prospects	3.10 (0.89) (3.01–3.18)	2.83 (0.86)	3.10 (0.85), 110	3.10 (0.90), 40	3.45 (0.91), 78	3.11 (0.82), 75	5.71 (4, 405) 0.000	0,05	IV > I
Wages and benefits	2.23 (0.90) (2.14–2.32)	1.99 (0.80)	2.34 (0.86), 108	2.27 (1.10), 41	2.25 (0.89), 78	2.37 (0.96), 75	2.83 (4, 405), 0.025	0,03	II > I
Organizational capacity to perform	2.72 (0.45) (2.69–2.78)	2.63 (0.46)	2.82 (0.43), 112	2.71 (0.42), 41	2.83 (0.42), 78	2.67 (0.49), 75	3.65 (4, 409), 0.006	0,03	IV > I II > I

Table 3
Association between type of operation and task (i.e Task clarity and Administrative support) and social context variables.

Variables	Type of municipal operation					χ^2(df, n), p	Cramer's V
	Care of disabled	Pre and primary school	Secondary school	Technical services	Elderly care		
Task clarity						χ^2 (4, 410) =21.63, p=0.000	0.23
Does your work contain tasks that are unclear or difficult to interpret?							
Almost never	24%	37%	39%	54%	26%		
To some or large extent	76%	63%	61%	46%	74%		
Administrative support						χ^2 (8, 410) =50.85, p=0.000	0.25
Do you have access to administrative support?							
No, not at all	21%	13%	9.5%	33%	15%		
Yes, part time	66%	70%	50%	28%	65%		
Yes, full time	13%	17%	40.5%	39%	20%		
Span of control						χ^2 (12, 404)=110.65, p=0.000	0.30
0–16	17%	10%	26%	69%	20.5%		
17–27	37%	18%	28%	14%	27%		
28–35	24%	36.5%	26%	8%	20.5%		
>35	22%	35.5%	20%	9%	32%		
Meeting frequency						χ^2 (12, 405) =57.28, p=0.000	0.22
Are there regular management meetings which you attend?							
Once or less than once every month	29%	24%	20.5%	46%	25%		
Yes, every second week	40%	38%	15.5%	34%	56%		
Yes, every week	31%	38%	64%	20%	19%		
Meeting attendance						χ^2 (4, 370) =20.89, p=0.000	0.24
Only managers at the same organizational level attend meeting	46%	26%	30%	14%	34%		
Managers from at least two different organizational levels attend meetings	54%	74%	70%	86%	66%		
Meeting content						χ^2 (4, 364) = 1.13, p=0.889	–
Either budgetary or operational issues are discussed	50%	53%	54%	58%	55%		
Budgetary and operational issues are equally discussed	50%	47%	46%	42%	45%		
Meeting participation						χ^2 (4, 368) = 11.00 p=0.027	0.17
Meetings are characterized by either 'Top-down' or 'Bottom-up' information	36%	21%	24%	14%	21%		
Meetings are characterized by dialogue between parties	64%	79%	76%	86%	79%		

actually explains 11% of the variance in Resource deficits, with care (of disabled) managers reporting significantly less deficits than school managers, and technical managers reporting less deficits than school and elderly care managers. When it comes to support, one third of the technical managers report they do not have any access to administrative support, this is the largest proportion among all groups. However, four out of ten technical managers have access to a full time administrative support, this is true for one out of ten care manager. There are no significant differences between the groups considering advisory support from peers. However, technical managers report a significantly higher degree of support from superiors (m=3.97) than care (of disabled) managers (m=3.31) and pre and primary school managers (m=3.38), and also a higher degree of support from expert functions than all the other groups. Technical managers agree to the proposition '*I work in an organization that provides opportunities for advancement for employees*' to a larger extent (m=3.45) than care (of disabled) managers (m=2.83), while managers of pre and primary schools agree to the proposition '*I work in an organization that provides high wages and good benefits*' to a larger extent (m=2.34) than care (of disabled) managers (m=1.99). Furthermore, the managers assessed their organization's capacity to perform by rating how satisfied they are with the opportunities they have in the organization to fulfill their managerial responsibilities. The mean value for the group of technical managers (m=3.65) is one unit larger than the mean score for care managers

(m=2.63). Also, pre and primary school managers are significantly more satisfied than care (of disabled) managers.

6.5. Social density

The largest proportions of a high number of subordinates (>35) are found among managers of pre and primary school services (35.5%) and elderly care (32%). Such a large span of control is only found among one out of ten technical manager. Actually, seven out of ten managers of this group have less than 16 subordinates. The association between type of service and the span of control is quite strong (Cramer's V=0.30).

6.6. Communication

To have regular management meetings every week is more common among the managers of secondary school services, than in the other groups. Almost half of the technical managers meet with their management group once a month, or less. When they meet however, it is very common that managers from at least two different levels attend the meeting. It is slightly more common among care managers to meet with managers at the same organizational level during these meetings, compared to the other groups, and 36% of the managers involved in caring for disabled people feel that meetings are characterized by either 'top-down' or 'bottom up' information, rather than dialogue between parties.

There is no significant difference in how the groups have assessed the balance between budgetary and operational issues raised during management meetings.

7. Discussion

Care work is typically a feminized activity. Over time, teaching has become more a gender-integrated profession, while production and maintenance work are traditional masculinized activities. In this study we found significant differences in 13 out of the 15 task context variables, and in four out of the five social context variables that we examined. These variables are all measures of preconditions that enable and constrain managers to do their job. If managers are to be effective and appreciated leaders, they need to hold positions that grant access to power and resources. The results from Table 2 show that in nine out of ten times where significant differences between the groups occur, the group of technical managers had more beneficial conditions than at least one of the other groups, usually the group of managers who are involved in caring for disabled people, who in turn are rated last in eight out of ten significant comparisons. Even though the effect size of each comparison is quite small (with Eta squared ranging from 0.02 to 0.11), the total effect of all of these variables on the managers' work situation may be considerable. When the organizational conditions are bundled together (cf. Rousseau & Fried, 2001), a pattern of unequal conditions appears, a pattern that we would not have looked for if we were not guided by gender theory. It is more difficult to make clear conclusions from Table 3. It is challenging to quantitatively grasp for example the quality of communication in management groups. However, the same pattern of disfavored care managers can be observed here, while a larger proportion of technical managers have fewer subordinates, full time administrative support, a clearer picture of their work tasks and opportunities to meet with managers across organizational levels. It could be argued that jobholders which have human beings as work objects would benefit from a situation where managers have enough time and engagement to provide frequent feed-back on complex work issues. However, such a situation is more likely to occur in technical services, where the general work conditions for managers appear to be more beneficial for a 'close' leadership. It is plausible that if managers have a strained work situation with little time for each employee, it will have negative effects on the work environment. Although this study does not empirically investigate employee outcomes, the findings can help to explain why working conditions and occupational health is particularly troublesome in female dominated human services (Härenstam & The MOA Research Group, 2005; SSIA, 2014; SWEA, 2014a,b).

One might further argue that it is meaningless to compare services that deal with humans, with services that deal with things. The specific work object and the technology of a service might motivate specific organizational arrangements and resource allocations (Thompson, 1967). For example, the disadvantageous situation for health care managers found in our study might have to do with the difficulties to delimit, measure, and standardize the infinite and intangible needs of sick and disabled clients. In technical services it is probably easier to link activities to costs. For that sake, there is no obvious reason why care managers should do with less beneficial organizational structures to support their work. Their responsibility for staff, budget, and daily operational activities are as important as for the other groups. A large span of control has the same negative effect on the managerial workload in masculinized as in feminized public services (Wallin et al., 2013). Managers responsible for human services would probably benefit more from administrative and advisory support than technical managers, given the elusive character of the work. The unequal access to key organizational resources is an example of how power

is constructed along gender lines in organizations, as suggested by Acker (2006) and Ridgeway (1991). This inequality affect both male and female managers, working in care services.

As mentioned in the introduction, the public occupations of caring and teaching were traditionally characterized by good working conditions and considered to be healthy and attractive work. The core job tasks of these occupations have not changed much over time. It is thus not inherent to the public sector to offer stressful jobs. Gender inequalities in working conditions and health are seen now in Sweden as well as in many other European countries (Eurofound, 2013). Our study illustrates how internal organizational structures are shaped differently, not according to the status of those who work there (see Fig. 1 on education level), but according to the status of the service. This is an illustration of how gender "rubs off" not only on jobholders and the job they perform (Cockburn, 1988), but also on sectors or branches of the labour market. Technical services have a high status in our time, and the managers of these services will be more often listened to and offered better working conditions than managers of less valued services involved in caring for children, disabled people and elderly. Our results indicate that the fight for status in the battle of occupational identity have not been successful in feminized services as they have not been able to resist deterioration of their organizational and working conditions (Ashcraft, 2013).

Our results is in line with earlier research on gender and public service organizations, suggesting that new management trends maintain or even reinforce the gender order (Thomas & Davies, 2002; Worts, Fox & McDonough, 2007). When masculinized and feminized contexts are kept apart in organization research, the gender inequalities which are ingrained in organizational structures remain unrevealed, and their outcomes in terms of health and behaviour are easily reproduced. It is important to identify and name inequality mechanisms which fall outside the realm of common discourses, public policy and areas of regulation (Connell, 2006). Before being subject to political conflict and struggles over legitimacy, mechanisms of inequality must be defined and leave the zone 'a-legitimacy' (Nousiainen et al., 2013). Our results indicate that there are institutionalized norms and practices about how to arrange the organizational settings in the differently genderized parts of the local government sector. This is something else than men and women's unequal access to beneficial positions or unequal rewards in terms of status and pay in work organizations. Our results also confirm results from a few comparative studies of gender regimes in public sector authorities. In one study in 10 strategically selected public sector agencies in New South Wales with different size, type of internal organization and type of work, it was concluded that despite changes implementing equal opportunities, gender division existed in several forms (Connell, 2006). Two studies of gender regimes in U.S. found differences in, for example, division of labour and promotion possibilities for women and men between agencies linked to their function and culture (Kerr, Miller & Reid, 2002; Newman, 1994). Thus, our study is also a contribution to comparative institutional literature calling for accounts of the consequences of gendering processes within and through political institutions (Beckwith, 2005; Chappell, 2006).

8. Limitations

In this study we used basic statistical analyses on a large number of indicators of organizational aspects that could indicate how power, resources and rewards were distributed in differently genderized services. When bundling organizational factors together as we do here, we gain in oversight but loose in fine-tuned analysis. We argue that the pattern is illuminating even though the variance in each variable in isolation may seem negligent. In

forthcoming studies, we suggest that hypotheses are formulated and tested with more sophisticated methods such as multi-level analyses of managers and employees who are nested within organizations and services. The present study indicates that such studies would be worthwhile. We also think that the results of the present study can be used as guidance for qualitative work of how daily practices are performed within organizations and how decisions are taken to allocate resources. For example, it would be interesting to attend meetings where strategic level actors argue for, and take decisions on how to allocate resources between masculinized and feminized services.

Another limitation is our deliberate exclusion of gender as an individual-level parameter. Our interest has been in testing whether the organizational conditions of both male and female managers within the same type of service differ from the level of organizational conditions of managers in other types of services. This is in line with scholars that advocate the exploring of gender at the structural level. We found evidence to support our assumption that managers within the same type of services have shared experiences that differ from the experiences of managers of other types of services. Considering gender as an individual level parameter would require different theories and a different analytical design. For example, we would need to provide theoretical reasons for why male and female managers within the same type of service might differ systematically in, for example, span of control or communication patterns. In fact, individual gender differences in managerial behaviour have found little support in research (Billing & Alvesson, 2000).

Another problem concerns the operationalization of organizational characteristics. We were not able to cover all aspects of Johns' framework. There are, of course, a lot of other organizational factors of interest. It is not easy, for example, to grasp the extent to which managers meet with other functions of the organization, and what they talk about. This is better achieved by qualitative methods. It could be argued that measures, such as the level of resource deficits and access to administrative support, should be operationalized with more objective measures. Because it proved difficult to find measures that are comparable across different types of services, survey data were used in this study. To enable comparisons of organizational conditions across services, sectors and branches of the labour market, there is a need for 'service-neutral' measures.

9. Conclusion

In this study, significant differences in the task and social context of managerial work were found between types of municipal services. These differences varied systematically with the core activity's connection to gender. In relation to the gender-integrated and masculinized services, the managers of feminized services enjoyed less beneficial possibilities to fulfil their assignment.

The present study provides an example of how to open up the black box of the inner life of organizations in search for mechanisms involved in explaining gender differences in work related health. We believe that the comparison of organizational arrangements and working conditions in differently genderized services is a fruitful path forward for researchers intrigued with working life inequalities. This requires that populations are constructed based on theory (Ragin, 2006). If masculinized and feminized contexts are not systematically compared, we neglect differences in the preconditions of work that can explain differences in occupational health and well-being. Comparative gender analyses that goes beyond the individual gender illuminate the systematic way that norms, laws and practices provide advantages for certain groups and disadvantage others (Weldon 2006; Yoder &

Kahn, 2003). As envisaged by Kolb, Fletcher, Meyerson, Merrill-Sans, and Ely (2003), an approach that addresses the gendering processes of organizations is bound to meet resistance. It challenges seemingly functional work processes and calls for new ideas, redistribution of power and reallocation of resources. The present study opens up for discussions on the consequences of unequal work conditions for managers in genderized work contexts.

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