

Old Wine in New Wineskins: Professionalism and Managerialism in the Performance Appraisal Interviews of Pastors in the Church of Norway

Stephen Sirris

MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society, Norway.

Contact: Stephen Sirris, MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society, Norway.
stephen.sirris@mf.no

Abstract

Performance appraisal interviews are a distinct feature of modern work organisations. A generic organisational script, appraisals have also been adopted by traditional professions within old religious institutions. Based on the theory of institutional logics, this article aims at providing new knowledge about the interplay of professionalism and managerialism in pastoral appraisals. It addresses the following research question: *How do professional and managerial logics intersect in performance appraisal interviews of pastors in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway?* This study clarifies the function, contents and ambiguity of appraisals by interviewing pastors and their leaders and analysing their experiences and expectations of appraisals. The author discusses how ideal-typical professional and managerial logics are demarcated and hybridised in appraisals. With the church in a state of transition, this study shows how the pastor profession constructs itself in appraisals by drawing on both logics yet primarily safeguarding professionalism.

Keywords

Performance appraisal interview, profession, managers, pastor, dean, church

Introduction

Performance appraisal interviews are synonymous with modern work-life and have been described as “one of the most common managerial practices in contemporary organisations” (Sorsa et al., 2014, p. 57). They are defined as “recurrent strategic interviews between a superior in an organization and an employee that focus on employee performance and development” (Asmuß, 2008, p. 409). These dyadic interviews address developmental goals, collaboration and social relations at work as well as promotions and salary hikes (Meinecke et al., 2017). Over the last decades, appraisals have become a generic and taken-for-granted organisational arrangement. A plethora of terms indicates their prevalence: employee performance, job appraisal interview, employee review, and employee appraisal, or hereafter, simply appraisals.

Appraisals potentially enhance the effectiveness and work quality of individuals and organisations, which justifies their ubiquity across sectors. Meinecke et al. (2017, p. 1056) report four advantages of appraisals: first, they facilitate social interaction between employers and employees. Both parties exchange information that can promote internal communication and organisational learning. Second, participation is part of individuals’ intrinsic motivation for development. Appraisals function as an avenue for feedback and performance evaluation as well as for growth opportunities and acquiring new competencies. Third, appraisals possess a democratic dimension since they give voice to the employees. Ownership of decisions is vital, and the setting of a conversation or interview enables the employee to speak up and share ideas and aspirations. Fourth, appraisals foster collaboration and support that improve relationships and organisational sense-making.

In the Norwegian context, conducting appraisals is part of the employer’s responsibility (Kuvaas, 2011). The Norwegian terms *medarbeidersamtale* and *utviklingssamtale* can be directly translated as “co-worker conversation” and “development conversation”, respectively. Appraisals involve direct communication between an employer and employee, where both parties participate in shaping decisions that impact the work situation. Although not mandated by the Working Environment Act, the legal demands regulating work-life can hardly be safeguarded without the dialogue facilitated by appraisals. Furthermore, co-determination resides in the structured meetings between the elected representatives of the workers and the employer. These practices also relate to the Norwegian norms of equality, work-life legislation and strong trade unions. Such contextual features distinguish Norwegian appraisals from those in other countries where evaluation feedback, scores and rated responses play a more central role (Spence & Wood, 2007).

Although numerous handbooks cover how to plan and conduct appraisals to reap their potential benefits (Sandlund et al., 2011), there is a general lack of knowledge about appraisals as an embedded organisational practice (Clifton, 2012). This is particularly so within religious organisations, from which I study a distinct case. No research is published on appraisals in the

context of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway. This article presents empirical knowledge about pastors' and deans' perspectives on appraisals within this context. Appraisals within the church are not necessarily characterised by religious semantics as, by nature, they are a generic organisational practice imported into a religious context. Nevertheless, pastors may be expected to use religious language even when talking about prosaic work-related issues. This is linked to whether the professionals are identified as pastors or employees or both as well as to the interactions between pastors and deans. Thus, appraisals are a fertile ground to explore the negotiation spaces for professional and managerial logics. The overarching research question is *How do professional and managerial logics intersect in appraisal interviews of pastors in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway?*

The article proceeds as follows: I first elaborate on the theoretical framework of this study—the institutional logics perspective—which I relate to the inherent duality of religious organisations. The empirical aspect of the study is then described in terms of data collection, sampling and analytical strategy. I then analyse the pastors' and deans' views on appraisals before discussing the findings and presenting the concluding remarks.

Theoretical perspectives

The institutional logics perspective

The theoretical perspective of institutionalism is integral to management and organisation studies (Scott, 2014). *Institution* is understood differently depending on the field of study. Conventionally, in the study of professions and organisations, institutions are patterns of conduct containing enduring elements from social life that affect actors' behaviour and thoughts (Scott, 2014). Within the broad stream of institutionalism, institutional logics constitute one trajectory. Logics or "rules of the game" are defined as "socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality" (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, p. 804). Thus, logics are coherent sets of guidelines for practices, beliefs, values and meaning-making. They reside on a field level yet are revealed in organisations through language and practices and manifested in symbols and materials.

This article captures two ideal-typical logics—professionalism and managerialism—as they manifest in pastoral appraisals. Professions are closed expert occupations, characterised by self-governance and discretion (Molander & Terum, 2008, p. 20). Professional competence is built through formal qualifications, training and socialisation. Collegiality and consensual decisions, with professional managers serving as first among equals, characterise professionalism. Essentially, professions constitute a mode of organising work. I use professionalism or a professional logic to refer to these elements (Freidson, 2001). However, professionals have been reluctant to adopt new ways of organising that challenge their autonomy. In the 1970s,

New Public Management reforms introduced a managerial logic into public organisations that were traditionally inhibited and governed by professionals and public officials (Christensen & Lægreid, 2016). Since then, organisations have seen a general transition in work-life away from traditional professional leadership and towards organizationally-driven management (Aldridge & Evetts, 2003; Evetts, 2011). A managerial logic consists of market elements and bureaucracy and is characterised by efficiency, hierarchy, line management and budgetary and managerial control (O'Reilly & Reed, 2011).

Although these ideal-typical logics can be experienced as contradictory, they are combined within organisations, where individuals shape and modify the institutions of profession and management. A prevalent logic offers templates and building blocks that actors may assemble and use (Pache & Santos, 2013). Actors are carriers of logics; they voice them and function as logics representatives. The bridging concept of *hybridisation* refers to a blurring or a novel combination of two distinct entities that are normally found separately (Noordegraaf, 2015). Hybridisations of organisational elements have become increasingly relevant after the New Public Management reforms. One example of it is hybrid professional managers: professionals who have transitioned to managerial positions, where they lead peers (Evetts, 2011). The logics framework provides tools to analyse how professional and managerial roles and identities are embedded in wider cultural systems that both enable and constrain them (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999).

The inherent logic duality of religious organisations

The dynamics between professional and managerial logics within the church are related to envioning cultural developments and changing internal organising. Mintzberg (1979) points to a general movement from simple structures with strong charismatic elements into more complex structures of bureaucracy. In Western Christianity, the religious connection between the believer and the divine is formalised and routinised through organisational structures. Religious organisations are well-recognised and stable gatherings for religious purposes, where their long history facilitates a strong institutionalisation of beliefs and practices. The key characteristics of such organisations are the theological foundation that offers values and meaning, the role of the clergy as an intermediary and the participation of lay members (Torry, 2017).

The dichotomy of professionalism and managerialism is pronounced within the contemporary Norwegian context, where some professionals are civil servants or public officials and where the public *ethos* is key (Slagstad & Terum, 2014). For example, the Norwegian clergy traditionally had a magisterial character as they represented the hegemonic Lutheran church which was a state church since the Reformation (Sirris et al., 2021). They were incorporated and regulated in the hierarchy of the absolutist state. This legacy remained until the 1800s (Gilje, 2014). It continued to function as the religious branch of the state administration. As officials, they acted as intermediaries between the central government and the community

in which they were embedded. They simultaneously represented the worldly power of the Lutheran kingdom *and* were shepherds of the local parishioners. This duality, or hybridization, has been central to Norwegian pastors. In comparison, the system of denominational diversity in the United States regards the churches as voluntary associations strictly separated from the state. Pastors were primarily caretakers of their congregational members and local community (Blizzard, 1956). In contrast, the Norwegian clergy were directly employed by the Ministry of church affairs: pastors until 1988, and bishops and deans until 2012. Formally, all clergy were civil servants until 2017, when the church attained the status of legal subject at the national level and employed clergy.

Although developing as a contemporary organisation, the church is also an institution due to its history and self-understanding as a folk church. Importantly, in 2012 amendments to the constitution, introduced in response to the growing diversity within the Norwegian society, granted the church greater self-governance, and an ecclesial reform process enabled the growing organisational bodies to handle their internal affairs. New laws and reforms have contributed to creating an increasingly complex organisation, consisting of several governing bodies at the national, regional and local levels. Nonetheless, to date, the Church of Norway has a semi-official status as the majority church, and its operations fall partly within the public domain because it is financed by the state and municipalities.

As a religious organisation and a state church until recently, it assumes hybrid forms, as it is situated at sectorial boundaries (Sirris et al., 2021). Currently in the process of transforming into an independent folk church, it is clearer positioned within civic society, as explained by the law on faith and life-stance communities of 2021. This development reflects a general trend where older and traditional institutions, public and civic alike, have been fitted into the template of human service organisations by adopting similar scripts and standards (Bromley & Meyer, 2017). Like other institutions marked by professionals and officials, the church is de-contextualised into the shape of the modern organisation.

Changes to and within the church embed and impact professional work. Contemporary religious organisations are increasingly undergoing two changes: professionalisation and bureaucratisation (Hinings & Raynard, 2014). The first development concerns educational training and vocational commitment, while the latter is linked to division of labour, hierarchy and a greater emphasis on rules and regulations through increased administration and decentralisation. Professionalisation and bureaucratisation have also been identified in the Church of Norway (Sirris et al., 2021). Key to this development are the dual roles of Norwegian pastors who are both autonomous professionals of religion under the tradition of being state officials and employees in a modern work organisation. A duality of pastoral work was pinpointed in Blizzard's (1956) seminal study on how pastors conceptualise and balance dual logics: organisational versus spiritual tasks and priorities in their work. The balancing of the sacred and the secular is described as "the pastor's dilemma". The parallel structures of the spiritual and the organisational realms can eventually lead to internal secularisation where religious authority

becomes less important. In other words, managerialism can decrease religious authority and promote a societal organisation that integrates non-religious templates and rational structures. The introduction of managerialism into religious organisations is best described by the Trojan horse metaphor. A conceptualisation of the duality in pastoral work was also proposed by Askeland (2016, p. 111) who distinguished between functional and theological pastoral work. However, this is mostly an analytical distinction as the practical work of pastors blurs the divide between the forms of work as pastors balance religious, professional, public and occupational values (Sirris, 2019b).

In Norway, the institution of the pastor profession is in transition. Pastors are mentioned alongside physicians and lawyers as classical professions (Fauske 2008, p. 33). Nevertheless, the clergy are sometimes excluded from the ranks of professions due to the lack of a scientific basis (Slagstad, 2008, p. 57). Recent empirical studies highlight how being a pastor means combining a traditional calling and developing into a stronger profession (Sirris & Byrkjeflot, 2019). Pastor as a profession has also been criticised within the church because it represents a rationalisation of the pastor and grants limited autonomy as pastors are restricted by confessional obligations (Karle, 2000). However, a calling and a profession are not mutually exclusive; rather they represent complementary perspectives (Felter, 2010, p. 234).

Studies on the developing pastor profession reflect cultural changes in society and show how the church utilises societal organisational and managerial ideals to contextualise and gain legitimacy (Sirris, 2022). In contemporary work-life, increased management and employer's liability strengthen the rights and responsibilities of both the employers and the employees (Askeland, 2016; Gee et al., 2018). Sirris (2018) investigated pastors' and the diocese leadership's expectations from deans and found five types of competencies related to management and professional leadership. Management consists of analytical, administrative and relational competencies. Professional leadership, by contrast, consists of contextual and disciplinary competencies (Sirris, 2018, p. 40). Deans are expected to be well oriented with the work of pastors and with the activities in the parish (Huse, 1999; Sirris, 2018).

Traditionally, the clergy talked to the dean or bishop when they needed counselling. Such a personal conversation about spiritual matters was, according to McClure (2014, p. 270), "an institutional enacting and embodying of the theology of presence, particularly in response to suffering or need, as a way to increase among people the love of God and of neighbour". Given this tradition, adopting a managerial logic is challenging for deans, and it is evident in their dichotomising language and practices (Askeland, 2016; Sirris, 2019a; Stifoss-Hanssen et al., 2013). These conflicts between a religious historical legacy and a modern work organisation are evident in the appraisals.

To conclude this section, pastors are informed by a multi-faceted professional logic in flux—derived from Lutheranism and their traditional position as state officials—and framed by a

strengthened managerial logic. Appraisals are highly useful to study the duality of this profession as they are an organisational arrangement imported into the church and situated at the intersection of the logics that influence pastoral work. Appraisals can be a secular or scarcely theologised part of pastoral work. Nevertheless, the boundaries between the sacred and the secular are blurred. While the characteristics of logics are not mutually exclusive, they constitute two distinct ways of understanding pastoral work. As illustrated by the complexity of the pastor profession, logics do not necessarily replace each other, rather they have an additive effect when coexisting (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999).

Research setting and methods

Appraisals constitute a space at the intersection of professional and managerial logics, and I use interviewees' narratives of employer—employee interactions in appraisals to illustrate the case. The Church of Norway serves as an interesting research setting for studying this phenomenon. Pastors enjoy a high degree of autonomy, even if they are led by a bishop heading the diocese. The eleven Norwegian dioceses have a total of 95 deaneries. The bishop delegates authority to the deans, who act as the closest employers of pastors, each managing 15–25 pastors in a deanery. Traditionally, the dean was first among equals, often being the eldest pastor in the area. However, the deanery reform in 2004 transformed the dean into a middle manager or an executing employer on behalf of the bishop (Stifoss-Hanssen et al., 2013). Local pastors since then are led by deans, who are consequently professionals with administrative duties and managers of the pastors in a deanery.

Pastoral appraisals have been compulsory in the church since 1993, but they have not been described in detail or researched (Huse, 1999, p. 23). The data reported in this article draw on an ethnographic study on church leadership completed in 2019. In a centrally located diocese that consented to participate, I first interviewed all nine deans individually. Then, in three deaneries under the diocese, I conducted a group interview each, involving six, seven and eight pastors. The interviews followed a semi-structured guide that included open-ended questions about management, roles, collaboration and interaction as well as the relation between pastoral work and being employed in a work organisation. All the interviews covered data on appraisals. The diocese shared a general template used for appraisals consisting of 12 questions addressing the work of the pastors under four themes: updates, collaboration, work and development. I conducted all the interviews in Norwegian and recorded and transcribed them verbatim. General information on the interviews is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of the data collection.

Factors	Pastors	Deans
Individual interviews	0	9
Group interviews	3	0
Interviewees	21	9
Gender	11 women, 10 men	6 men, 3 women
Tenure (years in average)	2–30 (12)	3–25 (9)
Age (average)	29–66 (44)	52–68 (64)
Average length of each interview	89 minutes	74 minutes
Transcribed pages	39	98

The collected data were initially coded using the NVIVO software. I identified material relevant to the theme of my study and used conventional thematic analysis for extracting information related to appraisals (see Table 2). The analysis focused on the research question and yielded three themes related to the appraisals. First, in terms of function, appraisals were taken for granted as an organisational arrangement and a natural practice in work organisations. Second, with regard to the contents of appraisals, both pastors and deans addressed the four overlapping topics: personal, relations, tasks and workload, and development. Third, pastors and deans alike described the ambiguities associated with appraisals. These were underpinned by a duality characterised by the integration of the spiritual and the secular.

Table 2. Illustrative excerpts from the data analysis.

Exemplary quote	Code	Category	Theme
<i>Appraisals belong in a proper and serious organisation</i>	Modern work organisation	Taken-for-grantedness	Function of appraisals
<i>Appraisals are part of my job; I need to listen</i>	Management	Regularity	
<i>His job is to challenge us yet also support us</i>	Supervision	Responsibility	Contents of appraisals
<i>It is about relations, workload and development</i>	Interference and autonomy	Show interest	
<i>The old collegial role and the new managerial role</i>	Historical change	Secular or sacred	Ambiguity of appraisals
<i>It is not pastoral counselling; this is a work setting</i>	Identity	Personal or professional	

Findings

The function of appraisals

In the interviews, the pastors talked extensively about patterns of communication and interactions with the dean. They distinguished between need-based occasional interactions and formal planned meetings held at a certain frequency. Although held annually, appraisals represented a significant milestone in the interactions between deans and pastors. The pastors regarded appraisals as an important indicator of working in “a proper organization”. Analogously, if a dean did not prioritise appraisals, pastors associated the behaviour with “not being a serious employer” and interpreted the absence as a sign of not meeting modern work-life requirements. They criticised a dean who omitted appraisals one year due to his workload: “Yes, appraisals are compulsory, and I do not honestly think anyone is very excited about them. But they are useful.” Appraisals were deemed as central to the pastors’ work-life. In all three group interviews with the pastors, appraisals were expected. They were viewed as an expression of an employer’s liability and the natural practice of a modern organisation, which included the church.

A topic common to all interviews was the overarching character of the appraisal: “It is about a holistic view.” One of the pastors summed it up as follows:

A good employer both leads and offers guidance. He challenges you with how your responsibility and commitments should be executed. He is responsible for the totality of the work experience—that you experience it as meaningful and challenging. He gives inputs on work-life balance. The appraisal concerns development and guidance.

This excerpt shows the high expectations from deans in terms of offering a holistic perspective and possessing diverse competencies. All the deans sought to prioritise annual appraisals of individual pastors. Two of them admitted to not always finding the time: “It is a part of our job as leaders, so I feel guilty when omitting it. It definitely should be arranged on a regular basis.” The deans viewed appraisals as a tool that was both scripted and improvised. They recognised them as a rare opportunity to voice their expectations.

The deans also shared how appraisals were conducted: “We take turns and vary the themes that are discussed. A key activity during those takes is to ask questions. It is crucial to let the pastors talk; we need to listen.” Appraisals varied considerably depending on the pastors. The deans explained how some pastors immediately began to evaluate the deans as employers, whereas others expected the deans to provide feedback, hoping that it would be in their favour. Nevertheless, the deans observed that appraisal conversations yielded loads of information about the parish and the present work situation, but little information flowed back from the deans to the pastors. It was important for the deans that the focus was on the pastors and their needs. This point surfaced in interview responses that referenced the present ecclesial hierarchical structure, whereby the deans’ functions had been strengthened to include appraisals with all the pastors in the deanery. It also reflected the tradition of the dean as first among equals and a superior in the state hierarchy. Interestingly, a formal qualification for a dean is to be a trained and ordained pastor, and most deans engage in pastoral work as part of their position. This essentially makes them colleagues of the pastors in the deanery. The deans observed that the strengthening of their managerial role made it challenging for the pastors to strike a balance between the dean’s dual roles as a colleague and a manager. Yet, the appraisals were primarily understood as managerial grounds where both parties expected the deans to act as interested and caring employers who had to address the needs of the professionals.

The contents of the appraisals

Regarding the contents of the appraisals, pastors explained how during appraisals, it was expected that the dean will interfere and ask questions:

Her job is to challenge us, not just to confirm. I am tired of vanilla conversations; we have enough of that elsewhere. The annual appraisal is the only time I really am taking stock of what it means to be a pastor and how to use time efficiently and prioritise.

Outside the appraisals, interference from the dean in ongoing pastoral work was not deemed popular. However, the typical responses to deans’ interference were toned down during appraisals, where it was expected that the dean would be somewhat intrusive and ask direct questions. Thus, appraisals constituted a distinct setting with rules separate from those that governed the ordinary relationship between deans and pastors. One pastor underlined this: “I need supervision; *episcopate*, spiritual oversight and guidance. But there is no need for the dean to get too close.” Another pastor expressed a similar opinion: “You do not want a dean

sitting on your shoulder, like a surveillance camera. We have our reasons for enjoying autonomy.”

The pastors associated appraisals with responsibility, which was contrasted against accountability: “The crucial thing is not to give a full account by reporting what we have done and want to do. Parochial statistics give such insights. Our work plans are also regularly discussed with the dean.” Rather, during appraisals, the dean was expected to remind the pastors about their core pastoral responsibility: “The dean promotes ownership. She encourages us to own the pastoral role: ‘This is yours, fulfil the role, do the task!’ She encourages and supports our work.”

This was interpreted as valuable affirmation and support. Another important appraisal topic highlighted by the pastors was that of growth and development:

Pastor 3: In the appraisals, the dean should impose some questions upon us: “Where are you now in your life, your service, how are you growing?”

Pastor 4: Yes, that’s the appraisal for you, fostering growth and development. He is supposed to facilitate development. I don’t like detailed liturgical guidance from the dean. Instead, he should ask: “How do you work with services? How are you developing? Do you neglect your life because you are working too much?” He gets a sense of how we use our time and efforts. We cover a wide range of tasks.

While commenting on the contents, all the deans emphasised the template for appraisals used in the diocese. Because they had conducted many appraisals and led individual pastors through the points, they referred mainly to those topics in their responses. The deans shared that they sent out a short form in advance to facilitate the pastors’ preparation: “This is primarily due to formalities, and secondarily to sharpen awareness about the upcoming appraisal.” While the order varied, the key topics discussed by all the nine deans in their appraisals were consistent. The quote below illustrates how deans exercised flexibility in their approach to appraisals:

First, the opening is very broad: “How are you?” This invites the pastor to foreground issues that are burning or important in some way. This can be personal stuff about life situation, health, life phases or challenging work-related issues.

Another consistent topic in the appraisal discussions was relationships and collaboration. The deans emphasised that the pastors by no means worked alone as they had to constantly interact with many people:

Where there are people, there are conflicts—or at least tensions. It is about relations, potential and ongoing conflicts, communication, distribution of tasks and responsibilities. Infrastructure and meetings. It is also about broader relations, for instance how the parish council is working.

Third, the deans addressed the different fields of work that the pastors engaged in. They used open phrases like “what is working or not, and how”. Services and the key clergy tasks were discussed, including youth work and confirmands. Church attendance or statistics were also referred to. The deans considered various perspectives and initiated dialogue, “sometimes in confronting or provoking ways.” They also covered work hours and workloads. The fourth topic that the deans spoke about in the interviews concerned professional development. One dean said the following:

I ask about the pastor’s own studies and immersion in Bible and prayer. For example, I remind the pastor about being a role model. I ask about their pastoral work instruction. Yet, I must admit that this is a balancing act. It depends on your relationship with the pastor. Some do not appreciate in-your-face questions.

The appraisals also included a section on formal competence, courses and studies. The development comprised participating in retreats that fostered spirituality. This was highly dependent on the special interest of the individual pastor. The deans wanted to plan for study leaves and prioritise such activities and the pursuit of pastors’ interests. While pastors and deans offered similar descriptions about the contents of the appraisals, the latter emphasised the flow of dialogue and the flexibility of the template.

The ambiguity of the appraisals

A recurrent theme in the pastors’ reflections was the lack of a clear understanding of appraisals or their boundaries. In explaining this, the pastors referred to how the relationship between the deans and themselves had developed historically through the disestablishment of the state church. The long tenure of several of the interviewed pastors implied that they had work experience from before the deanery reform in 2004 when the deans were authorised to act as middle managers executing the employer’s liability. These historical accounts surfaced in the discussion on the ideals of reciprocity and equality. The strongest link had now been formalised into a matter of employment. The interviewees clearly distinguished between what they called “the old role of the dean as our senior colleague” and “the new role of the dean as our boss”. These two roles paralleled the work that the deans performed: pastoral counselling in the old days and conducting appraisals today.

Some interviewees talked about drawing boundaries between the dean as an employer on the one side and as a pastoral counsellor on the other side. These roles had implications for the perceptions of proximity and distance in appraisals. The pastors reported that the deans in general seemed hesitant about discussing personal information in the appraisals; however,

one pastor said: “I have been invited by the dean in appraisals to tell *everything*. I have been open, but afterwards, it did not feel right. You know, she is the employer.” On hearing this, other pastors in the group interview immediately endorsed this pastor’s experience, adding that appraisals were not meant for sharing highly personal information: “I agree, this is a work setting. The mundane and secular aspects of being an employed pastor ought to be the central stuff.” The conversation continued as follows:

Interviewer: How do you see the spiritual role of the dean?

Pastor 5: The dean has said very clearly that he is not doing pastoral counselling with us. That would not be natural. For that, we have to contact someone else. Yet, one day, a pastor here had the difficult task of telling a family that their son was dead. The pastor spoke to the dean the next day. Tears were shed. Of course, it got personal. Still, that was a case of caring for personnel, not pastoral counselling.

Interviewer: I understand. Would you say that God belongs in appraisals?

Pastor 6: A former dean prayed after we had had a discussion... That was wrong, a demonstration of church power. Appraisals are not about my relationship with God, but my relationship with my ministry, with my job and my leader, not God. We have other arenas for supervision and mentoring—those arrangements explicate my relationship with God. Appraisals are essentially something different.

A clear pattern in the pastors’ responses was that instead of defining appraisals positively, in terms of their characteristics, the pastors defined appraisals negatively, by specifying what they were not. The pastors contrasted appraisals with pastoral counselling, mentoring and supervision. However, these divisions were not always clear, as the pastors viewed the dean as a “spiritual coach”, whose role involved both guidance and evaluation. Pastors’ age seemed to play a role in this context, as the younger pastors clearly separated appraisals from traditional and spiritual conversations, while the elderly could not. Senior pastors with long tenure found it easier to grasp the deans’ spiritual and administrative functions as specified under the old role.

The nature of appraisals and their boundaries were also a matter of concern for the deans, particularly the role of religion in appraisals. For example, a dean shared that he did not pray in an appraisal setting:

I do not want to signal that prayer is a language of power. Neither does the bishop. Yet, I could be clearer in asking: “Where do you get your energy from?” Or “Where is God in your life now?” I could ask: “What role does faith play in your life; how do you keep your faith?” But never: “How are you doing with Jesus today?” If they have problems of a pastoral nature, they must not come to me. But they can let me know, and I will find someone they can talk with.

However, another dean said that she ended appraisals by reading a passage of scripture and by asking if she could pray. The nine deans had different perspectives on how religion should be integrated into appraisals. One dean said, “In appraisals, God refers to how the pastors have time for studies and the promise of ordination. Yet these things border on pastoral counselling and the private realm.” The following quote shows how handling this issue requires sensitivity:

There are many things they have not told me. We can ask questions that you cannot do in another organisation: “Where is God in all things?” I can ask questions that can help them live in as integrated a manner as possible. Faith is integrated into all we do. I have said to some during appraisals: “I think you should talk to a pastoral counsellor about this.”

The appraisals covered a broad range of topics. Although they were supposed to address the entire work situation of pastors, the spiritual dimension was seldom explicitly addressed; rather, it was downplayed by both parties.

Discussion

Performance appraisal interviews of pastors constitute an intriguing meeting point, where a practice from modern secular work organisations is introduced in the church and into the realm of professional work. This friction triggers the question of how logics interact in the context of pastoral appraisals. This article provides new knowledge on the intersection of professionalism and managerialism by elucidating the function, contents and ambiguity of pastor appraisals. A distinct empirical contribution of this article is the exploration of experiences and expectations associated with appraisals. Interview data from the deans and pastors showed that appraisals were an accepted practice and did not stir any resistance. In fact, they were regarded as a symbol of a proper and modern work organisation. The pastors were more enthusiastic about appraisals than the deans. In a highly professionalised context, this finding is surprising given that appraisals are considered a tool stemming from a managerial logic, according to the literature (Asmuß, 2008; Sorsa et al., 2014). There are several explanations for this finding.

On a cultural level, professionals’ embracing of appraisals signals isomorphic pressures, indicating how organisations across sectors are becoming more similar. The principles of empowering rights and scientific rationalisation are valuable, irrespective of sectorial uniqueness (Bromley & Meyer, 2017). This development follows from the managed organisation and the strengthening of agency in general, notably so through reforms inspired by New Public Management (Christensen & Lægreid, 2016). How civic sector organisations, including religious ones, seek to maintain their identity in the face of increased formalisation, has been widely discussed. For example, traditional values and professionalism are safeguarded alongside instrumental pressures (Knutson, 2012; Sirris et al., 2021). Pastors’ appraisals reflect this wider

development, where professional and managerial logics coexist. The characteristics of this coexistence are dependent on contextual cues.

Appraisals play out differently according to organisational contexts (Asmuß, 2008; Clifton, 2012; Sandlund et al., 2011). In this study, the pastors operated in the context of a Nordic model, where work-life is characterised by collaboration and equality. Further, “the new work order” emphasises flat structures and low power distance (Gee et al., 2018; Kuvaas, 2011). Additionally, the pastoral profession traditionally enjoyed extensive autonomy and was loosely regulated within the state church hierarchy (Felter, 2010; Gilje, 2014; Karle, 2000). The church organisation is still de-centralised with pastors working independently in their parishes where they do not engage daily with their dean (Huse, 1999; Sirris, 2019b). These features strengthen the logic of professionalism and yield less room for managerialism. The fact that deans are regarded as facilitators and experienced peers in this study aligns with the traditional ideals of professionally based leadership (Aldridge & Evetts, 2003; Evetts, 2011). Interestingly, the study also highlights generational differences in the attitude towards appraisals: the interviewed pastors were on average 20 years younger than the deans and favoured appraisals more than their senior deans.

Specific contextual features also influenced the contents of appraisals. Both pastors and deans shared a basic understanding of appraisals, which was institutionalised in the church at least 40 years ago (Huse, 1999). Mainly, appraisals in the church covered four themes: personal issues, relations, tasks and development. These topics resonate with the general notion of appraisals across sectors, which emphasises exchange of information, fostering good social relations, operation, and development (Meinecke et al., 2017). However, other aspects like extensive feedback, salary issues and goals, which are key to for-profit organisations, were hardly present in my data (Clifton, 2012; Spence & Wood, 2007). Thus, pastoral appraisals appear less instrumental, rational and goal-centric. Instead, they emphasise reflections and sharing of information and experiences. This is likely a result of the collegial relations between the professionals and their leaders (Evetts, 2011). The pastors expected the deans to remind them about their responsibility in an empowering way. Thus, ensuring pastors’ development was key, both by challenging and supporting the pastors.

Given the scarce focus on achievements, pastoral appraisals can hardly be called *performance* interviews. There is hardly any trace of accountability; instead, there is a focus on responsibility. This, in turn, relates to the very nature of pastoral work where goals and accomplishments are difficult to measure, at least quantitatively, and their public *ethos*. This is contrary to the hallmarks of managerialism as endorsed in New Public Management reforms (O’Reilly & Reed, 2011). The professional logic emerging in this study is framed by the pastors’ history of being professionals and officials within a state bureaucracy. However, hierarchy is also a characteristic of managerialism, which shows how the elements of logics can overlap (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999).

The pastoral appraisals showcased an alliance between professionals and their hybrid professional managers (Noordegraaf, 2015). Deans' function in the appraisals was to the benefit of the profession. This resonates with Suddaby and Viale's (2011, p. 427) observation of professionals who develop a "schizophrenic ability to conform to the pressures of their employing organizations while, simultaneously, using the resources and power of the organization to initiate profound social change". My study illustrates how this strategy highlights agency in interpreting, handling and reframing pressures. In the context of pastoral appraisals, the professionals have taken control of this organisational arrangement to serve their own interests. This is facilitated by the deans being hybrid professionals (Sirris & Byrkjeflot, 2019).

The empirical material shows some interesting tensions between the religious-professional and managerial-organisational logics, reflected in the diverse understandings of the relations between dean and pastors. Instead of controlling the pastors, the deans addressed issues important to the pastors. To fulfil their duties, both parties relied on collaboration with the other. The dean embodied the duality of being a boss and a colleague. While this relation highlights a collegial expression of professionalism, it simultaneously encodes an employer—employee relation, revealing a managerial logic. This duality underpins the entire practice of appraisals. Paradoxically, pastoral appraisals are essentially not managerial grounds but profoundly professional. Thus, it is old wine in new wineskins. This metaphor signals that although the appraisals as such are novel, their function, contents and ambiguities are not.

The nature of this professionalism needs further elaboration as it is contrasted with counselling and defined in opposition to spirituality and a discussion of theology. Given the new understanding of the dean as an employer, all the pastors agreed that they should not seek counselling or discuss highly personal matters with their managers during appraisals. This indicates the bureaucratisation and professionalisation of the church (Hinings & Raynard, 2014; Sirris et al., 2021). An organisational framing has, in turn, implications for the relations between pastors and deans. The two parties are no longer only colleagues or leaders and followers, but employers and employees. This reflects a development in professionalism towards organised professions (Evetts, 2011). The pastoral appraisals follow a script and are defined in contrast to pastoral counselling. This phenomenon draws on psychological and theological resources to deepen the understanding of the pastoral relationship. According to McClure (2014), pastoral counselling is distinct from other forms of counselling and psychotherapy. This is due to the role and accountability of the counsellor and the counsellor's understanding and expression of the pastoral relationship. Pastoral counsellors represent the central images of life and its meaning as affirmed by their religious communities, and through counselling, they offer a link to that understanding of life and faith. Thus, such counselling is inherently different from appraisals. Appraisals denote a break from the pastoral and ecclesial heritage. Finally, the interview data revealed that appraisals were not understood as an arena for theological disputes, even though some deans prayed or read a passage of scripture in the setting.

Old Wine in New Wineskins

Table 3 summarises the professional and managerial logics discussed in this article. I underline that these are ideal-types that partly overlap in practice. This is particularly due to the hierarchic and administrative elements present in the professional bureaucracy derived from the state church tradition and that is central also to managerialism. The present study has illuminated how they hybridise in the appraisals.

Table 3. Ideal-typical professional and managerial logics in appraisals of pastors.

Logic Characteristics	Professional logic	Managerial logic
<i>Original domain</i>	Religion and state	Secular
<i>Nature</i>	Contextual	Generic
<i>Framing</i>	Traditional calling and state official	Modern occupation
<i>Organising</i>	Collegium and hierarchy	Hierarchy and line management
<i>Focus</i>	Spirituality	Work conditions
<i>Type of professionalism</i>	Occupational professionalism	Organised professionalism
<i>Pastor</i>	Independent colleague and fellow state official	Employee
<i>Dean</i>	First among equals	Employer
<i>Formalisation of leadership</i>	Elected and appointed leader legitimised by ecclesial and state authorities	Employed manager with organisational mandate
<i>Leader role</i>	Self-leadership	Separate leader role
<i>Answerability</i>	Responsibility	Accountability
<i>Principle of control</i>	Trust	Formal authority
<i>Principle of work</i>	Realising calling and fulfilling obligations	Empowering rights and duties
<i>Basis of authority</i>	Supervision and mentoring	Employer's liability
<i>Competencies</i>	Contextual and disciplinary	Administrative, relational, strategic
<i>Working hours</i>	Unlimited	Limited, planned and reported
<i>Organising principle</i>	Autonomy and discretion	Regulations and standardisation
<i>Conversational space</i>	Colloquium and pastoral counselling	Appraisal interviews
<i>Tasks</i>	Theological <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading by word and sacrament • Teaching and leading a life of faith • Building the Christian community 	Functional <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing co-workers • Leading by observing, listening and following up • Strategic development by planning and reporting

Concluding remarks

Despite their prevalence as a generic organisational script and managerial tool, performance appraisal interviews are under-researched within the studies of professions. From the institutional logics perspective, this article presents new knowledge on how managerial and professional logics meet in appraisals. It shows how the logics are not fixed and unmalleable, but rather worked upon and shaped by both professionals and managers. While the two parties share an understanding of the function and contents of appraisals, they emphasise slightly different aspects. In the context of the church, the appraisal is a rather novel concept, which is evident in the ambiguity associated with it. A distinctive practice, appraisals are different from pastoral counselling. The pastor profession constructs itself in appraisals by drawing on both logics yet primarily safeguards professionalism. The result is a better work-life for the individual pastor and a “normalization” of the church as a traditional institution towards a modern organisation.

One of the limitations of this study is the small number of interviews conducted for data collection. Even if drawing on the perspectives of both professionals and managers, future research should include additional data sources. Observation studies can provide valuable granular data and capture the practice of appraisals. The same phenomenon could also be explored on a greater scale using mixed methods and quantitative approaches. Future studies could also investigate the various logics in greater detail beyond an ideal-typical approach, not least how several logics intertwine. Lastly, it would be beneficial to study the religious dimension of the pastoral profession and examine why religion is not articulated more clearly in appraisals.

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