CREDIBILITY AS A SOURCE OF POLITICAL CAPITAL: EXPLORING POLITICAL LEADERS’ PERFORMANCE FROM A CREDIBILITY PERSPECTIVE

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Leaders’ political capital is conceptualized by Bennister, ‘t Hart, and Worthy (2013) as the sum of political leaders’ skills, relations, and reputation. This conceptualization of leaders’ political capital shows a resemblance to the traits competency, trustworthiness, and caring that political leaders need to have to be considered credible. As such, credibility entails a judgment of a receiver (e.g. an authorizing environment) about the believability of a speaker, and it is thus a relational concept: it is up to audiences to attribute credibility to political leaders. Starting from the resemblance between political capital and credibility, this paper first explores credibility as a source of political capital. Moreover, what remains underexplored is what convinces audiences of their leaders’ competence, caring, and trustworthiness. To study this and to do justice to the relational nature of credibility a turn to dramaturgy is proposed. In this paper it is therefore addressed with use of a dramaturgical framework consisting of staging, framing, and scripting how political leaders perform that some of them are attributed credibility whereas others are not. This is illustrated with an analysis of two leaders with a contrasting credibility development during the Dutch parliamentary election campaign of 2010: Job Cohen and Mark Rutte.

1. Introduction
For political leaders to be able to function and to deliver, having a healthy ‘stock’ of political capital is essential. Political capital has been described in various ways, but in one way or another it relates to something that leaders need to have in order to get things done. Schugurensky (2000), for example, refers to political capital as the capacity to influence political decisions, and Bennister, ‘t Hart and Worthy (2013) consider political capital a means to assess the political authority of leaders. In this respect it is worthwhile to be able to determine the size of leaders’ stock of political capital. To this end Bennister, ‘t Hart, and Worthy (2013) have developed a Leadership Capital Index (LCI).

In their view, the political capital of leaders is ‘the aggregate of a leader’s political resources’ (Bennister et al., 2013: p. 2) and it can take three main forms: skills, relations and reputation. The first main form of political capital, skills, can be broken down into two types of skills. On the one hand leaders can draw political capital from ‘hard’ skills, which refer to transactional qualities like technical competence resulting in tangible achievements. Soft skills, on the other hand, include providing a compelling vision and inspiring one’s audience. Overall, skills thus refer to the ‘cognitive, physical, communicative and managerial capacity’ (Bennister et al., 2013, p. 5) of political leaders. Relational capital, secondly, follows from the notion that authority and political capital do not exist in isolation, but they come about in the relationship between leaders and followers. As such, relational capital ‘refers to the loyalties that leaders mobilize’. This does not only relate to the relationship with party members, but to the
relationship with the media and the wider electorate as well. To be able to gain relational capital, the audience’s needs, interests and wishes should be perceived to match with what the leader in question has to offer. The last main form of leaders’ political capital can be summarized as ‘walking the talk’ and thus entails the extent to which a leader is experienced to have kept his promises and the extent to which he has lived up to the expectations. According to Bennister et al. (2013), reputation can help to build leaders’ political capital only when two conditions are met. First of all, the ‘normative core’ should be perceived as fitting for the times according to the audience. Secondly, if promise and reality do not match a leader’s reputation is not necessarily damaged. The gap can, for example, be considered limited or caused by external circumstances instead of by leaders’ faults.

This conceptualization of leaders’ political capital consisting of skills, relations and reputation shows a resemblance to the traits leaders need to have to be considered credible. To be credible, leaders need to be competent, trustworthy, and caring for their audience. In other words: they need to have the necessary skills and knowledge, they need to be honest, and they should not be in politics for personal gain. Although this resemblance between political capital and credibility might seem clear, it requires further exploration as it is not often been considered systematically. In this paper, two related aspects of credibility and political capital are therefore given attention. In the first part of this paper the value of credibility for leaders’ political capital is addressed to establish why the two concepts need each other. It is argued that credibility is a source of political capital for leaders, meaning that being considered credible lends a leader political capital to spend.

Next, an issue is taken up that is underexplored both in the literature on credibility as well as in the conceptualization of the LCI. Bennister et al. (2013) recognize that – for example regarding the necessary skills – it is not as much about the skills that leaders ‘really’ possess, but that what matters are ‘the competencies that are projected on to leaders by their authorizing environment’. As such it is the audience, like an audience of citizens, who in the interaction with leaders attribute certain abilities to their leaders. What remains to be sufficiently answered is on what basis citizens determine that leaders have certain traits or skills. What is it that leaders do or say – how do they perform – that citizens reach the conclusion that their leaders are credible? This issue will be explored with use of two illustrative Dutch cases, the cases of Mark Rutte (leader of the Liberal Party) and Job Cohen (at the time leader of the Social Democratic Party) during the parliamentary election campaign of 2010. The resulting analysis might provide clues to further operationalize the LCI.
Before turning to the need for credibility, however, it is necessary to take one step back. At this point it might seem self-evident that leaders need political capital, if only because the word capital is associated with something that is desirable. Nevertheless, it is possible to be more specific about the relevance of political capital if a closer look is taken at the nature of (political) leadership. Following Tucker, Blondel (1987, p. 16) summarizes leadership as consisting of three consecutive tasks. The first is to diagnose what is going on; what is the problem that needs to be addressed? Following on the diagnosis it becomes necessary to ‘prescribe a course of action’, which means that the problem that was identified is in need of an answer. Finally, only identifying a problem and formulating a solution is not enough if people do not act upon it. In other words, key to leading is to mobilize others toward the prescribed course of action to address the identified problem. As such, Blondel concludes that ‘leadership is a complex concept which attempts to cover a complex reality: that of citizens prepared, to an extent at least, to follow a ruler in the direction s/he chooses’ (1987, p. 34). To persuade someone to follow a leader in the direction he chooses is not that simple. Political leaders face complex problems and need to take tough decisions with sometimes unpleasant consequences for citizens (Heifetz, 1994, p. 26). To be able to take the necessary but perhaps unpopular decisions, and to survive taking them as well, leaders need political capital.

2. CREDIBILITY AS A SOURCE OF LEADERS’ POLITICAL CAPITAL

The concept of political capital originates in the work of Pierre Bourdieu who besides political capital distinguished between among others economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. Of these four types mentioned by Bourdieu, political capital is least explored (contrary to social capital which has a rich research tradition compromising among others in the work of Robert Putnam). After Bourdieu, several scholars have taken up the concept of political capital and they have developed the concept in different directions. A major difference is between on the one hand the approaches that consider political capital a structural phenomenon, and on the other hand the approaches that think of political capital as a personal attribute. Within the latter type of conceptualizations a difference can be made between focusing only on ‘professional politicians’ or on ‘individuals’ in general, and ‘citizens’ in particular.

Political capital can thus relate first of all to the confidence and legitimacy one bestows upon political institutions. As Whiteley and Seyd described it, ‘political capital refers to citizen feelings about the political regime as whole, not just about the party or coalition which is currently incumbent. It is broader than the concept of legitimacy, since it encompasses citizen perception of regime competence, as well as
of regime legitimacy’ (1997, p. 128). In this conceptualization political capital entails the structural qualities of an entire system; the more enduring feelings about the functioning of a political system as a whole, and it transcends the individuals who take up political positions at a given time.

In the second conceptualization, political capital is not linked to structural, system characteristics but to a quality associated with individual citizens. As Sørensen and Torfing pose when discussing the democratic quality of political networks, political capital refers to ‘the individual powers to act politically’ (2003, p. 610). These individual powers are based on three elements: access to the process of decision-making, the ability to make a difference, and the way in which people see themselves as political actors. In other words: political capital consists of endowment, empowerment, and political identity (Sørensen & Torfing, 2003).

Yet other scholars seem to associate political capital with the individual politicians who are active in the political domain and who need this type of capital to be able to function in their position. In part this is also discernable from the notion of Bourdieu that political capital is a ‘symbolic capital than an agent possess’ (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 39), which

‘can be conserved only at the cost of unceasing work which is necessary both to accumulate credit and to avoid discredit: hence all precautions, silences and the disguises, imposed on public personalities, who are forever forced to stand before the tribunal of public opinion, their constant need to ensure that they neither say nor do anything which might contradict their present or past professions of faith, or might show up their inconsistency over the course of time’ (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 193).¹

Harvey and Novicevic, for example, refer to the political capital of global leaders as their ‘ability to use power or authority to gain the support of constituents in a socially effective way’ (2004, p. 1177). Furthermore, in the daily use of political capital it seems to apply to the amount of potential political influence or – as politicians themselves refer to it according to Schugurensky – ‘their capacity to mobilize people’ (2000, p. 421).

Although it is thus clear that political capital is not only relevant for professional politicians, or political leaders in particular, it is this group that is focused on in the remaining part of this paper. It is therefore

¹ See however what Bennister and Worthy note in 2012: ‘for Bourdieu it [political capital] relates less to political leaders and more to the ability of citizens to translate social capital in material benefits’. Schugurensky (2000) in turn, explicitly states that one of the shortages of the political capital concept as Bourdieu formulated is that it only applies to professional politicians.
useful to specify political capital to leaders’ political capital. Not surprisingly, this means that in its conceptualization leaders’ political capital comes close to being a commodity that professional politicians need. Renshon describes it as ‘the character, capacities, and performance of those given responsibility to lead and govern in this and other societies’ (2000, p. 202). In Renshon’s thinking, character is the cornerstone of personality, in which the capacities – the second source of political capital – are embedded. Performance, moreover, relates to what the leader actually achieves and realizes. Examples of these achievements include accomplishments like economic growth, and low unemployment. Schier, on the other hand, defined leaders’ political capital as ‘party support of the president in Congress, public approval of the president’s conduct of his job, the president’s electoral margin and patronage appointments’ (2009, p. 5). In this sense, leaders’ political capital provides insight into when leaders might have the ability to use power or when they are in the capacity to mobilize others.

The above description of political capital suggests that it is an asset that leaders own, like a pile of money on a bank account. Indeed, earlier I referred to it as something that leaders ‘possess’, as it is a quality on which leaders can draw when participating in the political domain. However, it should not be forgotten that without an audience, without citizens or constituents, there would be no (political) leadership. In other words: leadership is relational (’t Hart & Uhr, 2008, p. 11; Peele, 2005, p. 195; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Leaders’ political capital is not only derived from personal capabilities, but especially trust from the public – ‘a group of followers’ – is paramount (Schugurensky, 2000, p. 420). Bourdieu refers in this respect to the notion of ‘credit founded on credence or belief and recognition, or more precisely, on the innumerable operations of credit by which agents confer on a person (or on an object) the very powers that they recognize in him (or it)’ (1991, p. 192). As such, one’s political capital is at least in part at the mercy of one’s constituents and therefore needs to be earned. This is where the notion of credibility comes in.

It can be argued that for political leaders credibility is crucial in order to build political capital and that credibility might thus be considered a source of political capital. After all, political capital is a form of credit founded on credence. Without it (or more precisely: if a leader has too little credibility), it is unlikely that political capital can be put to effective use as one’s persuasiveness becomes seriously hampered, and it is hard to imagine how a leader would succeed at that point in mobilizing others. As Kouzes and Posner state: ‘if people don’t believe in the messenger, they won’t believe the message. If people don’t believe in you, they won’t believe in what you say’ (2003: XV, emphases in the original).
The relevance of credibility to political capital can be clarified further, however, by exploring the relevance of credibility in itself and by taking a closer look at credibility's conceptualization. These two issues are taken up in the next two paragraphs.

3. THE NEED FOR CREDIBILITY
That credibility is an important source for political capital can also be understood from looking closely to reasons for why political leaders need to be credible. This need for credibility relates to both developments within government and society, including personalization of politics, and network governance.

Communication between politics and society is to a large extent mediated: it is via the media that citizens acquire information about each other (Strömback, 2008). In the way this communication is organized, politics is (partially) personalized, meaning that in their reporting media focus on persons like political leaders (Campus, 2010; Langer, 2007, 2010; McAllister, 2007; van Santen & van Zoonen, 2010). On the one hand this can refer to a focus on the performance related traits of leaders. It is evaluated whether leaders have the necessary qualities – like competency, integrity, and reliability – to adequately deal with the problems at hand (Bjerling, 2011; Miller, Wattenberg, & Malanchuk, 1986). Next to professional qualities, some scholars also find in their research a tendency for media to focus on personal qualities of the leader and his personal life as well. The question is no longer whether leaders
are competent and reliable, but whether they are – for instance- loving fathers or talented musicians (Langer, 2010).

In should be realized, however, that besides the media politicians have sought to exploit some of the benefits of personalizing as well, as it is ‘easier to market political choices to voters through a familiar personality, who can promote the party’s policies much more effectively to voters when compared to the simple dissemination of a press release or through the publication of a policy document’ (McAllister, 2007, p. 577). In addition, politicians try to improve their reputation and communicate their messages via non-traditional platforms and formats (Street, 2004, p. 437). Examples include former Dutch prime minister Balkenende appearing on the gossip chat show ‘RTL boulevard’ or president Obama singing a few lines of ‘Sweet home Chicago’ (RTL Boulevard, November 16 2006; The Washington Post, 2012).

In practice the distinction between private and professional qualities is not always easy to make (Langer, 2010; Van Aelst et al., 2011). Nonetheless, what is relevant for the study of credibility is that it are qualities of political leaders that attract attention and that these qualities matter for how citizens judge their leaders and the plans they propose. On the basis of the information citizens get via the media they determine what a leader is ‘really’ like, whether he has what it takes and whether he is doing the right thing. In other words: the leaders’ credibility becomes an important criterion for evaluating politics. For leaders trying to acquire political capital this means that they need to take advantage of how the media report on them in order to foster a credible image.

Besides that credibility matters in light of personalized political communication, credibility is also indispensable for political leaders in the policymaking process. Policy is not made individually and in isolation, but as the literature on network governance suggests, governance networks exist alongside the traditional institutions and routines (Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003; Kjær, 2004; Rhodes, 1996). Characteristic of these networks is that the various actors participating in them to find a joint solution for the problems at hand are interdependent. None of the participants have all the necessary resources to find and implement solutions. Contrary, even though the power balance is not necessary equal, each participant has resources to contribute that others lack. As a result, political actors present in these networks cannot bluntly force the others to take a certain route, but they need to be convinced of their need to cooperate.

Persuading the other participants in the governance network to cooperate does not only hinge on convincing them of the appropriate solution. The issues that political leaders face can be complex and
can be assessed in diverse ways, depending on the perspective actors take. Various actors, like interests groups and politicians, can thus diverge greatly in how they perceive and understand what is going on (Dewulf, Mancero, Cardenas, & Sucozhanay, 2011; Metze & Van Zuydam, 2013). In this respect, it is not as much the question what the right solution would be, as first needs to be answered what the (nature of the) problem exactly is. As such, to be able to move forward and to deliver, first a meaning-making contest needs to be played out to reach a shared problem definition (Hajer & Versteeg, 2005).

To favorably end meaning-making contests about the problem at hand, as well as to persuade others of the appropriate course of action and of the need for them to cooperate, credibility is crucial. Without it participants’ interpretations would not be heard or easily discarded, as they could not make plausible claims about the problem at hand. Consequently, credibility is not only important in election campaigns, but it matters in routine times as well. This relevance of credibility and its contribution to political capital, however, bears the question to mind what being credible as a political leader entails. This is answered in the next paragraph.

4. CREDIBILITY: TRAITS AND MORE

Credibility has been studied in disciplines as varied as communication studies, Science and Technology Studies (STS), and Law. Remarkably, however, in political science and public administration little substantial attention has been paid to the topic, even though credibility is implicitly linked to topics like electoral success, leadership performance, and – the topic of this paper – leaders’ political capital.

Credibility can be defined as the ‘judgments made by a perceiver (e.g. a message recipient) concerning the believability of a communicator’ (O’Keefe, 1990). What this definition first of all makes clear is that credibility is a relational concept. It is not something leaders possess, something that is inherent to their personality, but it is something that they need to earn, what needs to be attributed to them by their public (Andersen & Clevenger, 1963, p. 59; Teven, 2008, p. 385). Moreover, it is not enough if citizens attribute credibility to a leader once. Rather, whether leaders are still worthy of being rewarded credibility is a question that audiences need to address time and again. This means that instead of being a stable factor, credibility can wax and wane (Van Zuydam & Hendriks, 2014). As such, credibility is not only relational, but it has a dynamic nature as well.

Knowing that credibility is relational and dynamic, however, does not reveal much about when perceivers consider communicators to be credible. Although the interest in the contribution of the source to persuasiveness dates back to the work of Aristotle (confer his threefold distinction between
ethos, pathos and logos; Aristotle, trans. 2004), Carl Hovland and his colleagues at Yale University were among the first in the 1950s to pay systematic attention to the concept of source credibility, as part of their broader study on persuasive communications. Hovland, Janis and Kelley (1953) stated that a communicator’s credibility depends on his perceived ‘expertness’ and perceived ‘trustworthiness’. In subsequent research – in which mostly a factor-analytic approach was taken – scholars associated various lists of traits with credibility, but at its core it was found time and again that credibility consisted of the two dimensions Hovland et al. proposed: competency and trustworthiness (Berlo, Lemert, & Mertz, 1969; McCroskey & Young, 1981; O’Keefe, 1990; Pornpitakpan, 2004; Self, 2009). Competency refers to the knowledge, expertise and the experience of the speaker. In the case of political leaders this could relate to the knowledge, expertise, and experience necessary to adequately address societal and political issues. Trustworthiness, secondly, refers to the extent to which an audience perceives a communicator to be honest and not deceitful (O’Keefe, 1990). Nevertheless, since the 1990s it has been convincingly shown that there is in fact a third dimension to the credibility concept: perceived caring or ‘goodwill’. This perceived caring entails that the public needs to be convinced that the speaker is listening to them, that he has their interests at heart, and that he is – in the case of political leaders – not in politics to fill his pockets (McCroskey & Teven, 1999; Perloff, 2010). Earlier this trait was part of the trustworthiness dimension, which makes intuitive sense. How can someone be worthy of your trust if he does not have your interests at heart? Still, even though they are clearly related (just as competency is related to the two other traits as well) analytically caring and trustworthiness are distinct.

The finding that in general credible speakers are those speakers who are perceived as competent, trustworthy, and caring is nevertheless still not very satisfactory: it does not provide insight into what these three traits entail. As such, there is a need to move beyond the traits that are projected on leaders to how they actually perform vis-à-vis their audience. It should be realized that performance in this sense does not relate to extent to which government realizes its goals, but to how political leaders ‘act’ on the ‘stages’ of, for example, media and parliament.
What it means to be competent, caring, and trustworthy – and thus how leaders should perform to be considered credible according to an audience – is not determined in isolation, but depends on the context in which the leader operates. This relates to the main point made in interactional and contextual approaches to leadership (‘t Hart & Uhr, 2008; Helms, 2005, pp. 19–20, 2012). There is considerable debate whether leadership actually matters and to what extent leaders are limited by their context. On the one hand of this spectrum scholars argue that political leaders are mostly constrained and that leaders hardly make a difference, on the other hand of the spectrum views can be found that adhere to the ‘Great man’ and ‘heroic’ approaches to leadership (Hargrove & Owens, 2002; Hargrove, 2002; Peck & Dickinson, 2009, p. 15; Yukl, 1996). Both these views have been criticized, and it seems sensible to take a middle position. As Rockman has argued ‘institutions shape much but, in the end, determine little’ (1997, in Helms, 2005, p. 19). Not only institutions matter in this respect, but culture, mass media and events are important as well (Helms, 2012; Kane, Patapan, & ‘t Hart, 2009). Leaders are thus not victims of their environment, but the context provides constraints and possibilities with which they can and have to work.

In light of credibility, the idea of an enabling and constraining context means that the way in which leaders perform needs to match the environment in which they act. Again, the context does not dictate what leaders do, but they do structure what an audience expects of leaders as well as what they can do. Think for example of the credibility trait ‘competency’. What is considered competent depends first of all on the type of democracy in which one operates. Ideal typically one could expect that majoritarian democracies are in need of assertive, ‘strong’ leaders, whereas consensus democracies would benefit of leaders that are more modest and who can build bridges between different parties (Hendriks & Karsten,
Besides the more formal institutions also the problems at hand structure what is expected of leaders. A severe economic crisis might demand different skills than when leading in a more uneventful period.

In addition, also within one type of democracy and one timeframe we expect different things from different types of leaders. Leaders of opposition parties have a different role to play in the democratic game than cabinet ministers do. This is in line with Helm’s observation that ‘skill is by definition a highly context-sensitive concept’ (Helms, 2012, p. 654; also consider McCaffrie, 2013). As for example Job Cohen has experienced – whose case is discussed in more detail later on – being an administrator is quite different from being the leader of a political party fighting to win the elections. Finally, it matters which type of audience is judging the leader in question. As Bennister et al. (2013) note on the enabling environment, leaders can receive support from a range of actors. An audience of citizens learns about their leaders in a different way than civil servants at a ministry might, and fellow members of parliament differ from captains of industry in what they notice about a leader’s performance and in what they might expect from leaders. As such, before analyzing a political leader’s credibility or his political capital, it should be clear what type of leader is being analyzed, in what type of democratic system and by which type of audience.

5. MOVING BEYOND THE PROJECTED TRAITS - STUDYING PERFORMANCE
Earlier it was posed that the political capital that leaders acquire depends in part on the credibility that an audience of, for example citizens, attributes to a political leader. What thus matters for credibility is how competent, caring, and trustworthy audiences perceive their leaders to be. To really take this relational nature of credibility seriously requires an alternative approach to the study of credible political leadership. It is thus not sufficient, as is for example common in political psychology, to determine a leader’s personality for reaching a judgment on why he is thought credible, as this neglects the interaction in which the credibility judgment is formed. Credibility does not exist outside the relational interaction between leaders and followers and to understand a credibility judgment attention should thus be paid to how leaders act in the interaction. Taking a dramaturgical perspective provides a way to do this and enables to move beyond the projected credibility traits to address the question what it actually means to be attributed these traits in a given context.

The dramaturgical perspective originates in the work of literary critic Kenneth Burke, who in the 1930s developed a dramatistic model of human behavior. Burke’s main point was that human interaction cannot be sufficiently explained by looking to the internal needs of the individual or to the external.
environment in which an individual functions. Contrary, because humans are not animals or machines Burke considered it best to analyze human interaction in terms of drama (Brissett & Edgley, 1975). Within the social sciences, among others Erving Goffman elaborated on Burke’s work. One of his most well-known books is ‘The presentation of self in everyday life’ (1956), and like Burke’s ‘dramatistic’ model, this book revolved around human interaction that was analyzed with the use of the theatrical metaphor. Human interaction, Goffman posed, entails that in contact with others individuals try to control the impression they make, whereas at the same time others try to acquire information about the individual or they ‘bring into play information about him already possessed’ (1956, p. 1).

Goffman’s line of thought can also be applied to the field of politics and public administration, as for example Murray Edelman (1967) has shown. Applied to political leaders it can be stated that the impression political leaders make on their audience, for example an audience of citizens, is not set in stone. Combined with the notion that credibility is a relational concept this means that it is perhaps not as much about how competent, caring, and trustworthy a leader ‘really’ is, but about leaders showing their audience that they are. This does not mean that leaders can control everything, but they are certainly not helpless either. Contrary, by paying attention to the elements of staging, framing, and scripting in their performance, leaders can engage in impression management (Benford & Hunt, 1992; de Landtsheer, Vries, & Vertessen, 2008; Gardner & Avolio, 1998). These three elements encompass what is said in a performance and how it is said, as well as where it is said with what appearance. In the following paragraphs is explored what these three elements exactly entail, which is illustrated with the cases of Mark Rutte and Job Cohen during the parliamentary election campaign of 2010 (See textbox 1 and 2).

5.1. Staging
Staging relates to the design of the stage - the surroundings in which the performance takes place – the props that leaders can utilize, and the personal appearance of the leader in question (Gardner & Avolio, 1998, p. 43; Schlenker, 1980). Key is to what extent leaders can take control of the design of the stage, the props, and their appearance. Are they in charge of what is happening or do they need to work with what the setting has to offer? This also relates to the notion that the type of setting determines what is considered appropriate (cf. Schön & Rein, 1994, p. 31). In parliament one would speak via the chairman, whereas in a television show this tends to be uncustomary.
Textbox 1: the cases of Job Cohen and Mark Rutte

The parliamentary election campaign of 2010 revolved around the duel between Mark Rutte, leader of the Liberal party, and Job Cohen, at the time leader of the social democratic party. This battle ended in favor of Rutte, but it was not an easy win. At the start of the campaign, Rutte was hardly considered a potential prime ministerial candidate and his credibility was relatively low. In the polls on most preferred next prime minister, for example, Rutte was not even an available option for respondents. During the campaign this gradually changed and Rutte was able to build a prime minister worthy image as well as an image of someone who was worthy of being attributed credibility. The credibility of Cohen, on the other hand, developed in the opposite direction. At the start of the campaign the switch of this runner-up World Mayor and European Hero from Amsterdam to national politics was welcomed with great enthusiasm. On instant, he was considered the most preferred prime minister and it was hoped that he could put a stop on the demise of decency in national politics. With the election campaign progressing, however, Cohen was increasingly criticized and his credibility in the polls and the media reporting as the next ideal prime minister started to wane. As such, in the end Rutte became the next prime minister of the Netherlands, whereas Cohen left national politics disillusioned after barely two years with the words that he had ‘not succeeded sufficiently to show the way to a decent society in a credible way’ (Press conference Job Cohen, The Hague, 20 February 2012).

Textbox 2: Some methodological notes

Starting from the assumption that the communication between national politics and citizens is mediatized, and that credibility is a relational concept in which it are citizens who determine whether leaders are credible or not, the mediatized interaction in 22 television performances of Rutte and Cohen was analyzed. Various types of television shows were selected: speeches, debates, and current affairs talk shows. All shows were transcribed and consequently analyzed with the dramaturgical framework of staging, framing and scripting. In other words: in all 22 television shows was determined how the staging, framing, and scripting was enacted. In addition, 1180 newspaper articles of three national newspapers (Volkskrant, Telegraaf and Metro) were analyzed for how Cohen’s and Rutte’s performances were received by journalists, citizens and other politicians. This provided insight into how audiences judged various aspects of the performance.
The cases of Rutte and Cohen show that they mostly operated on the same type of stages: speeches, debates, and current affairs talk shows. Whereas with regard to the latter two types of stages they mostly had to comply with the set-up of the stage that was already present, they were fully in charge of their speeches. The design of the stage is not something that can be changed in a daily current-affairs show, but in their speeches they could alter the stage to their needs. Indeed, the setting in which Cohen, for example, announced his candidacy for the Social democratic party differed greatly from Rutte’s speech at the convention of the Liberal Party. Whereas Cohen stood behind a wooden culprit in a relatively small room, Rutte spoke on a stage without using notes and a culprit in a more spacious setting. In addition, with regard to their appearance, Cohen had the best papers at the start of the campaign. Being roughly twenty years older, Cohen’s appearance gave him an advantage over Rutte, as all things being equal older-looking people are considered more politically competent than younger-looking people (Berggren, Jordahl, & Poutvaara, 2010; Hendriks, 2014). Nevertheless, the cases of Rutte and Cohen show that looks alone are not enough, as Cohen was not able to maintain this initial advantage throughout the election campaign.

5.2. Framing

Framing, secondly, can be described as a ‘quality of communication that causes others to accept one meaning over another’ (Gardner & Avolio, 1998, p. 41). In line with this definition it can be argued that to frame is to highlight some aspects of a specific issue while hiding others (Yanow, 2000). Frames are, moreover, omnipresent. As among others Manuel Castells has argued, everybody thinks in frames as this is the way in which our brain is programmed. Frames contain our basic views on the world, what is right and what’s wrong, and are thus rooted in values. For politicians looking for their views to be accepted by their audience, it is necessary to adhere to the frames citizens employ. As such, political leaders’ frames need to resonate in society (Entman, 2003, p. 417; cf. Kinchy & Kleinman, 2003; Metze, 2006).

A closer look at the framing utilized by Rutte and Cohen revealed that both their frames had a strong potential to resonate. Whereas Rutte aimed for a ‘responsible society’ in which all take responsibility for their own lives and for each other and in which the Liberal Party takes control of the state’s finances, Cohen’s central focus was the ‘decent society’ with which he meant that all could participate in society and that no one was left behind. Both frames were rooted in values deemed important in Dutch society: Cohen’s frame related to the values solidarity and equality, Rutte aimed for the classic-liberal freedom and the earlier mentioned responsibility. In addition, in both cases it was possible to apply the frame to
three important domains in life: society, government, and the economy. Nevertheless, having formulated a potentially strong frame is in itself not enough: to be effective this also has to be made explicit in the actual performance. This increases the chance that an audience recognizes that individual views are connected to a coherent vision and that the leader in question actually knows what is going on and what needs to be done. Rutte was successful in doing so, for example in his argumentation for why ‘opportunity deprived’ immigrants should not be allowed to move to the Netherlands: ‘opportunity deprived’ immigrants do not have the means to take responsibility for their own lives as they cannot provide in their own livelihood. Cohen’s enactment in the actual performance, on the other hand, remained more fragmented and ad hoc. When he was asked, for example, to defend his view that the smoking ban in the hospitality industry could partially be removed, he did not do so in reference to his ‘decent society’ frame.

Next to taking initiative in answering questions by connecting individual views to the overarching frame, initiative should also be taken in defending against critique. Although frames tend to be self-confirming to the people employing them, it is not necessarily the case that one’s frame is dominant in society. Especially in politics, multiple frames can compete with each other for prominence. Consequently, political leaders will regularly attack each other’s views and the motivations behind them. If political leaders do not defend themselves against this critique, they run the risk that their opponents views might actually take hold in the mind of their audience. In Cohen’s case, for example, his relatively passive attitude only affirmed the critique that he lacked the necessary qualities to be a ‘fighting’ politician. Rutte, contrary, nipped the critique on his responsible society in the bud by actively responding it. For example, when being accused of copying the plans of the populist Wilders on immigration, Rutte ended his response with: ‘Mr. Rosenmöller, I truly object to any suggestion that we propose this because of the former colleague which we just discussed in the clip’ (Paul Rosenmöller en..., 2010). If he did not get the opportunity to respond straight away, he would (try to) create one. Moreover, not only did Rutte respond, he also posed a strong alternative as he stayed away from the language of his opponent. As Lakoff poses this is the right thing to do because ‘their language picks out a frame – and it won’t be the frame you want’ (Lakoff, 2004, p. 3). If you use the language of the other, what you say will be judged by the standards of your opponent, and therefore you will never ‘win’. A clear example of this can be found in a debate between Cohen and Wilders. During this debate Cohen did indeed take the initiative to defend himself against Wilders on how to deal with problematic youth – which was not self-evident considering his relatively passive attitude –, but he did so on Wilders terms. When Wilders asked him if he did not agree that street terrorists should be evicted from the country like
terrorist Cohen responded that he wanted to explain once more what the difference was between terrorists and street terrorists. By referring to this troubled youth as street terrorists he only affirmed their existence and called into mind the framework for how terrorists should be handled.

5.3. **SCRIPTING**
Scripting, finally, ‘refers to the development of a set of directions that define the scene, identify actors and outline expected behavior’ (Benford & Hunt, 1992, p. 38). In this sense, framing and scripting are closely related. Scripting can be considered an extension and embodiment of framing. Whereas framing refers to ground ideas and values, scripting entails the way in which the frames are put into words. In part this relates to the type of rhetoric that is employed, but it also refers to – for example – the relationship that a leader builds with his audience.

The type of rhetoric with which political leaders seem to fare well during an election campaign in the Dutch context is to build a double connection with their audience. According to Aristotle, there are three main types of argumentation: pathos, logos, and ethos. Pathos entails that a speaker tries to stir certain emotions in his audience to make them more open to his message. Ethos, the second persuasive strategy, concerns the character of the speaker. To convince an audience of something a speaker can also refer back to his own qualities, showing that he has the necessary knowledge, expertise or skills to make certain statements and that an audience can believe them to be correct. Logos, finally, means that the speaker demonstrates that something is true. The speaker – such as the political leader – provides a series of arguments that accumulates to one logical conclusion. Logos thus mostly relates to the quality of the argumentation (Aristotle, 2004, p. 98).

Interesting about Rutte’s performance was that he did not rely on only one type of argumentation – which Cohen mostly did. Rutte even combined pathos and logos argumentation within one fragment and he thus spoke to both the minds and hearts of citizens. In addition, Rutte made use of concrete examples like ‘Monique’, a physically challenged woman who loves her job as a journalist but that it takes her eight hours to arrange logistics for each eight hours she works, to illustrate the urgency of some of his plans. As Cohen mostly relied on logos argumentation he remained more aloof. Rutte’s case suggests that the strength of his arguments increased when he combined ratio with emotion, as in the ‘Monique’ example. It made the audience feel involved and made it more difficult for citizens to resist his message – although admittedly it would probably not have convinced his most fierce opponents. Cohen’s language was more technical and he appealed mostly to the mind of citizens. See for example Cohen’s response to Rutte’s statement that he would create 400.000 jobs up to 2040:
‘You will create those jobs, I’ll admit that, they will be there in 2040. At the end of this period there will be extra unemployed because spending is cut significantly. (...) Or plans for cutting spending will lead to an additional number of unemployed in the order of magnitude of 50.000. With you that will be 100.000’ (Prime ministers debate, 2010).

Consequently, his views and the justification of them remained more abstract and his audience did not feel personally addressed that easily.

Even though constraints of space do not permit that the cases are discussed more elaborately, what even this brief description of the differences between Rutte’s and Cohen’s performances makes clear is that it is possible to move beyond the projected credibility traits to what it actually entails to be considered as such. This enables a more specific analysis of credibility and is more sensitive to potential differences in roles (e.g. party leader or cabinet minister), audiences (e.g. citizens or members of parliament), and stages (media setting or parliamentary settings). As such, our understanding of political capital benefits as well, as it provides insight into how political leaders actually perform that either lends them political capital or depletes them from it.

6. Conclusion
In this paper two issues with regard to credibility and political capital were explored: the relevance of political capital and credibility as well as why credibility is a source of political capital; and what it takes to be considered credible according to citizens. As such, what this paper contributes is that it elaborates on the aspect of credibility that is implicitly part of Bennister et al.’s (2013) idea of leaders’ political capital. Moreover, it suggests a way for scholars to move beyond the projected traits to see how credibility is enacted in practice. Although much work remains to be done, this might provide a profitable route to further develop indicators for the Leadership Capital Index.

Having a healthy stock of political capital is necessary for leaders to ‘get things done’, as without it leaders will have a difficult job to mobilize others to follow in the direction a leader chooses (Blondel, 1987, p. 34; Harvey & Novicevic, 2004). Persuading someone to follow might be relatively easy at times in which you can promise to realize popular measures. Political leaders face complex problems, however, which might require tough decision with sometimes unpleasant consequences for citizens. In these cases, persuading citizens to follow one’s lead might be less self-evident. To be able to take these measures, while also surviving as a leader, political capital is indispensable. One source from which leaders can draw political capital is, as shown in this paper, from the credibility they hold in the eyes of their audience, for example an audience of citizens. As Kouzes and Posner have phrased it roughly ten
years ago: ‘if people don’t believe in the messenger, they won’t believe the message’ (2003, p. XV). Especially credibility has also gained importance over roughly the last 25 years due to the presence of network governance, and the personalization of political communication. Although these developments apply to government and the interaction between politics and society respectively, what they have in common is that a stronger focus is put on political leaders to gain support for plans and proposals. This support cannot be demanded by force, but needs to be gained through persuasion.

Credible speakers are those speakers who are considered competent, caring, and trustworthy by their audience (McCroskey & Teven, 1999; O’Keefe, 1990). Although this sheds light on the notion of credibility, it does not clarify what it means to be considered competent, caring, and trustworthy. After all, credibility is a relational and dynamic concept in which it is the audience who time and again decides whether the leader in question is worthy of being attributed credibility. To discover what it takes for leaders to be considered competent, caring, and trustworthy it was shown in this paper that taking a dramaturgical perspective is instrumental. With use of this perspective it becomes possible to move beyond the projected traits to how leaders actually perform vis-à-vis an audience. Through staging, framing, and scripting political leaders can manage their performance and try to build the desired image.

The resulting findings of the illustrative cases of Rutte and Cohen in the context of a Dutch parliamentary election campaign show that leaders are not necessarily successful in building such a credible image and that clues to understand why can be found in their performance. Comparing citizens’ judgments on Rutte’s and Cohen’s credibility with how they performed suggests that credible political leaders take initiative in defending against critique and in connecting individual views into an overarching vision, as well as that they speak to both minds and hearts of citizens.

Political capital has been paid attention to in this paper mostly in light of credibility, and it has been argued that credibility should be considered a source of political capital. Nevertheless, it is not the intention to suggest that only credibility matters for political capital or that the two amount to the same thing (as this would render one of the two terms obsolete). Other elements or sources of political capital are already implicit in Bennister et al.’s (2013) conceptualization of leaders’ political capital, and have been studied in other streams of leadership research as well. Although earlier I criticized leadership research in the political psychology tradition for the risk of neglecting the perceptual nature of political leadership, what this type of research does draw attention to are the concrete (cognitive) skills and personality types from which leaders can draw political capital. Admittedly, also these skills and personality patterns need to be projected onto leaders by at least one of their potential audiences, but
yet it is hard to believe that only appearing to have – for example – knowledge of the economy without actually having a clue can be considered a political resource.

In addition, (perceived) achievements can be considered another source of political capital. Leaders can have the necessary qualities; they can appear to be the best man for the job, but if it is not recognized that expectations have been met in what leaders have accomplished, it can be argued that leaders’ capital to act suffers. What Hendriks (2014) refers to as the y-factor and as De Landtsheer, De Vries and Vertessen (2008) pose, a favorable impression helps political leaders to act only to a certain point, as in the end they are judged on their (perceived) governing results. Also Gardner and Avolio hint at the importance of results when they state that ‘leaders must show through tangible results, or the appearance of such, that they can deliver on their promises’ (1998, p. 40). By showing tangible results leaders can prove that their plan has worked and as such ensure that future plans will be favorably assessed. Living up to expectations and achieving the promised results thus helps leaders to gain political capital.

These sources of political capital are presented as more or less independent of each other. However, it is likely that in practice that they are highly intertwined and that the sources of political capital can reinforce each other. Indeed, it is not unthinkable that (cognitive) skills and appearing competent as part of credibility can only be separated analytically. Moreover, getting things done might become difficult without being credible, as earlier it was suggested that credibility is needed to – for example – convince other participants in a governance network to cooperate. However, also the other way around (perceived) achievements can foster credibility as it can be used as proof and as such can help leaders to show in their performance that they are worthy of being attributed credibility.

Besides the contributions of this paper to the further development of the Leadership Capital Index, it is also necessary to address some limitations combined with suggestions for further research. In this paper a way was proposed to analyze the performance of leaders to understand how their credibility rating in the eyes of citizens comes about. The two illustrative cases of Rutte and Cohen proved valuable insights but were also limited in various respects. The cases take place in the Dutch context, in a consensus democracy and during elections. This makes it difficult to make inferences about political leaders in other countries, in other types of democracy and outside elections. Replication research is needed to determine whether these two cases are exceptional or whether they are indicative of a specific set of cases. In addition, in this paper only the leader’s credibility according to citizens is taken into account, whereas leaders need to pass credibility tests of other audiences as well (Wisse, 2014). Think for
example of a cabinet minister, he also needs to earn credibility from his civil servants to be able to function effectively. Thirdly – and perhaps most fundamentally – in this paper steps have been taken to study credibility in action, but to do truly justice to the relational nature of credibility, it is necessary to take an additional step. Almost by default, interaction is a two-way business. Although this was acknowledged, emphasis in this paper has been on the part of the leader. The part of the audience was included in that their credibility ratings of Rutte and Cohen were taken as a starting point as well as that newspaper articles containing audience’s views were analyzed, but our knowledge of credibility would benefit if further research would pay more substantial attention to the part that audiences play. As such, although political capital and credibility are not unexplored territory, much remains yet to discover.

7. Reference List


