



The Leadership Capital Index: A New Perspective on Political Leadership

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CHAPTER

9 Modern Prime–Ministerial Leadership in the Netherlands: Consensus or Confrontation?

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Abstract

This chapter discusses the leadership style of Dutch prime ministers (PMs) and asks the question what type of leadership skills, relations, and reputations are most effective in modern Dutch politics: a consensual or confrontational style. While Dutch politics traditionally favors leaders who employ a consensus-oriented leadership style, prime ministers Balkenende (2002–2010) and Rutte (2010–present) served at a time when socio-cultural changes and mediatization of politics were challenging this political practice. By applying a modified version of the Leadership Capital Index (LCI), the chapter shows that to ensure re-election, both PMs struck a careful balance between the consensual and confrontational leadership styles. Whereas the study indicates that prime ministers have considerable leeway in how to strike that balance, the results suggest that it is essential that they maintain constructive relations with their peers in government and parliament to be electorally successful in the Dutch political system.

Keywords: leadership capital, LCI, Dutch politics, prime ministers, mediatization, leadership style, consensus democracy, democratic practices

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Introduction

Dutch political culture and practice traditionally favor down-to-earth leaders who employ a consensus-oriented leadership style. However, socio-cultural changes and the mediatization of its politics have altered the Dutch political practice and may be conducive to a more confrontational leadership style. This raises the question what leadership style Dutch political leaders adopt and what type of leadership skills, relations, and reputations seem to be effective in modern Dutch politics: a more consensual style or a more confrontational style. To answer it, we apply a modified version of the LCI to describe and analyze the leadership capital dynamics of the two most recent prime ministers of the Netherlands: Jan Peter Balkenende (2002–2010) and Mark Rutte (2010–present).

Both these leaders had to deal with the changing Dutch political landscape during their terms in office, but were able to secure re-election even after a cabinet crisis in which their previous government was ousted from office. To determine to what extent Balkenende and Rutte relied on a traditional Dutch consensus-oriented or a more confrontational style to secure their success, this chapter proposes a further contextualization of the LCI framework. In particular, we propose a two-dimensional operationalization of the LCI framework encompassing not one but two sets of indicators: one that reflects a consensual and one that reflects a more confrontational style.

p. 165 We will show that to secure re-election, Balkenende and Rutte both struck a careful balance between consensual and confrontational leadership styles. The cases of Balkenende and Rutte furthermore suggest that Dutch politicians have considerable leeway in how exactly to strike that balance. Overall, Balkenende and Rutte's success was to a large degree based on generic leadership skills, reputations and relations not specific to consensual or confrontational political systems. In contrast to other political systems, the case of Balkenende and Rutte suggests that in the Dutch political system, prime ministers can be electorally successful even though they are only moderately popular amongst the wider public, as long as they maintain good and constructive relations with their peers in the government and in parliament.

Leadership in a Consensus Democracy

The Netherlands is a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral parliamentary system. The Dutch Tweede Kamer (Lower House) is directly elected and has 150 members. The Eerste Kamer (Senate) is indirectly elected via the provincial councils and has 75 members, which serve as co-legislators and controllers of the Lower House (Andeweg and Irwin 2005; Neelen et al. 2005). Constitutionally, the position of the prime minister is no different from that of the portfolio ministers, except that, when the prime minister resigns, the whole government is dissolved. Moreover, with the revision of the Dutch constitution by Thorbecke in 1848, the concept of ministerial responsibility was introduced. This concept stipulates that the ministers, including the prime minister, are accountable for the actions and decisions of the government and should resign when parliament's trust is breached.

The Netherlands is a prototypical consensus democracy characterized by one of the most proportional electoral systems in the world (Lijphart 1999). As a result, it has a high and still increasing number of political parties, which are generally unable to achieve a majority in elections. This high number of political parties makes multiparty coalition governments inevitable (Andeweg and Irwin 2005). In addition, the Dutch political system is inclusive: decision-making usually involves not only the government parties but is also coordinated with other public and private stakeholders. This political practice is rooted in a broader Dutch culture that is highly egalitarian, assertive, individualistic, and feminine (Hofstede et al. 2010; Taras et al. 2012; cf. Thierry et al. 2008). This means that the Dutch are relatively unaccepting of power

differences, value their individuality and input, and prefer to solve conflicts through negotiation and building relationships.

p. 166 This Dutch political practice of “consensus, compromise, and consultation” has the advantage of generating oversized coalitions that provide policy stability even when there is turnover in the political color of the government (Andeweg and Irwin 2005, p.240; Hendriks 2010, p.71). On the other hand, consensus, compromise, and consultation does slow down the policy-making process and “the involvement of so many agents in policy-making may result in convoluted compromises that are sometimes deliberately vague in order to keep everyone on board” (Andeweg and Irwin 2005, p.224).

Studies show that these national political and cultural characteristics may affect the type of leadership style that is considered desirable by its citizens (Hofstede et al. 2010; House et al. 2002; Koopman et al. 1999). As an egalitarian and relatively feminine country, Dutch leaders are expected to be “one of us,” down to earth, and accessible (Hendriks and Karsten 2014; Te Velde 2002). In addition, they must be sensitive to the positions of the various groups in society and politics and strive to involve all stakeholders and resolve conflicts through compromise and negotiation. Dutch leaders are expected to aim for fair, equal and workable solutions. After all, to get things done in a consensus-oriented but individualistic culture, leaders should find ways in which divergent views and interests can be brought together to everyone’s advantage. Dutch politicians have traditionally done so by acting pragmatically and using an array of techniques to depoliticize the tackling of sensitive issues: “keeping things together,” through a relatively technocratic, matter of fact style of leadership (Hofstede et al. 2010; Thierry et al. 2008).

Although political systems and national cultures are relatively stable, over time changes occur that may lead to a different preferred style of political leadership. The Dutch political system is particularly interesting in this regard because in recent years radical changes have taken place in the political culture. More specifically, the past fifteen years have been marked by political instability. After the 2001–2 rise, and subsequent assassination, of the populist politician, Pim Fortuyn, the already emerging electoral volatility was sharply exacerbated and traditional party structures were put to the test. As a result, since 1998 none of the country’s coalition governments have served a full four-year term. Dutch voters’ behavior can no longer be predicted on the basis of once-dominant determinants such as religion, social class, or ideology (Van Holsteyn and Irwin 2004). A number of small, single-issue parties have become electorally successful, further fragmenting the already fragmented political arena. In line with this political fragmentation, Dutch culture at large has become more individualistic, masculine, and risk-tolerant. More value has been placed on competition, achievement, success and innovation, and less on the need for regulation (Thierry et al. 2008; Taras et al. 2012).

p. 167 The mediatization of politics has played an important role in this trend (Hajer 2009; Klijn 2014). Mediatization can be described as “the process in which there is a development toward increasing media influence” over both individual perceptions and political institutions (Asp and Esaiasson 1996, pp.80–1; Strömbäck 2008). As a result, the media became the most important source of information for citizens to learn about national politics, and media logic governs political communication (Huysmans and De Haan 2010; Bennet and Entman 2001; Van Holsteyn and Irwin 2004). This has led to increased drama, personalization of politics, and “horse races” (Campus 2010; Hajer 2009; Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999). Dutch leaders are now required to take firmer stances than they used to, be tougher debaters, show decisiveness and strength, have more performative flair to be electorally successful (Ergeneli et al. 2007; Esser 2013; Klijn 2014; Korthagen 2015). A number of surveys have shown that Dutch citizens increasingly favor strong, brave, determined, and dedicated leaders (Hendriks et al. 2012).

These changes in Dutch national and political culture raise the question of what leadership style is effective in acquiring and maintaining leadership capital to effectively govern and secure re-election in the

contemporary Dutch political system. Will the traditional consensual leadership style still do the job, is a more confrontational style required, or does some hybrid of both deliver the strongest leadership capital?

Adapting the LCI

In order to explore this question, this chapter compares the leadership capital of the two most recent Dutch prime ministers, Jan Peter Balkenende and Mark Rutte. Balkenende and Rutte are the only two prime ministers that have held office since the onset of the instability and medialization of Dutch politics. Moreover, the political fortunes of these men show some resemblance: both were relatively unknown and unpopular prior to coming to office and had to face a major cabinet crisis but were still able to win subsequent elections. To strengthen the similar case design of this study, the leadership capital of Balkenende and Rutte will be studied during similar periods in their careers.

p. 168 Jan Peter Balkenende served as prime minister for eight years, from 2002 to 2010, as leader of the Christian Democratic Party (CDA). After a leadership crisis within the party, the relatively unknown Balkenende was nominated and assumed the party leadership on 1 October 2001. After a few months, he unexpectedly became prime minister on 22 July 2002 (Van Weezel and Broer 2006a). His victory came at a tumultuous time. The rising populist politician, Pim Fortuyn, was assassinated nine days prior to the elections. In the wake of this tragedy, Balkenende debuted as a prime minister heading an unruly and short-lived coalition government of the Liberal Party (VVD) and the disintegrating List Pim Fortuyn (LPF) party. Following another massive swing election in late 2002, Balkenende's second coalition government consisted of CDA, VVD, and the Social Liberals (D66). This government also dissolved prematurely when the latter party left the coalition in June 2006. Despite the upheavals, Balkenende was able to win yet another election and was asked to form another government, now with the Social Democratic Party (PvdA). His LCI will be based on data from late 2002 until February 2007, when the fourth Balkenende cabinet was sworn into office.

Mark Rutte has served as Dutch prime minister since October 2010, four years after he was elected leader of the Liberal Party. His first cabinet was a minority government consisting of the Liberal Party and the Christian Democrats. The cabinet relied for its majority on the support of the populist Party for Freedom (PVV) led by Geert Wilders, who is known for his criticism of the EU and Islam. Rutte dissolved the government on 23 April 2012 following Wilders' withdrawal from the coalition's annual budget negotiations. He won the subsequent September elections and teamed up with the center-left PvdA. His LCI covers late 2010 until the coalition crisis of April 2012.

The original operationalization of the LCI indicators was inspired predominantly by prime-ministerial leadership in majoritarian systems (Bennister et al. 2015). In the study of Tony Blair, for instance, the British prime minister achieves a high score in the early parts of his term because of the radical transformative nature of his vision. In the traditional consensus culture of the Netherlands, however, radical visions may cause problems for a prime minister who needs to keep very different ideological parties and stakeholders together (Te Velde 2002; 't Hart 2005). Nevertheless, cultural changes and medialization of politics might have induced a shift in the Netherlands towards a more majoritarian practice, which may require a more confrontational leadership style. To reveal what leadership style "works" for a contemporary Dutch prime minister, we score Balkenende and Rutte on both these dimensions separately.

Five LCI indicators were identified as particularly susceptible to differences in political culture and practice: leaders' vision and communicative performance; personal polling relative to opposition leader; longevity; and levels of trust/sympathy (indicators 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7; see Table 9.1). The other, more generic, indicators (5, 6, 8, 9, and 10) are relevant for both more consensual and confrontational political practices although some indicators needed slight adjustment to the Dutch political and party system. Elections for the party

leadership (indicator 5) for example, are a novel and not yet significant phenomenon (Fiers and Krouwel 2005, p.140).

Table 9.1. The consensual and confrontational dimension of LCI

No	Indicator	Operationalization	
		Consensual Systems	Confrontational Systems
S1 — 01	Political/policy vision	Creating a future together, collaboration, “keeping things together.” Pragmatism.	Transformational & distinctive from relevant other party/political opponent
S1 — 02	Communicative performance	Technocratic, evidence-based and unifying rhetoric	Ideological rhetoric and debating performance
S2 — 03	Personal poll rating relative to main opposition leader	Trust rating relative to main opposition leader	Sympathy rating relative to main opposition leader
S2 — 04	Longevity: time in office	Previous significant cabinet and parliamentary experience	Time in office
S2 — 05	(Re-)election margin for the party leadership	Election margin in internal party leadership elections. How is the leader chosen/selected as party leader and support for leader from party members	
R1 — 06	Party polling relative to most recent election result	Virtual seats versus actual seats in parliament	
R1 — 07	Levels of public trust in leader	Trust	Sympathy
R1 — 08	Likelihood of credible leadership challenge within next 6 months	Support for leader within the party, in light of leader challenges or general dissatisfaction	
R2 — 09	Perceived ability to shape party’s policy platform	Consensus within party on policy proposals. Does the entire party vote the same way, or are there “dissidents”	
R2 — 10	Perceived parliamentary effectiveness of leader	Compromises, reaching agreements, keeping promises, goals accomplished	

We have already seen that in consensual systems strong, radical vision may lead to problems in relations with the various coalition partners of different ideological backgrounds. Rather than radical and distinctive vision, leaders may therefore be best advised to stress the need for collaboration and adopt a pragmatic stance. Likewise, in confrontational systems, strong, powerful rhetorical narratives and communicative performance may set a leader positively apart from the opposition. However, in Dutch political culture a more, muted, inclusive and pragmatic-technocratic rhetorical performance has long been the norm (see Table 9.1).

With regard to the absolute and relative personal poll standings (indicators 3 and 7) there may also be important contextual differences. While all leaders rely on “popularity” to some extent, studies into the public perception of leaders reveal important differences in how exactly such popularity is measured and what elements of leaders’ reputations matter. In a consensus democracy like the Netherlands, trustworthiness is one of the most consequential features of a political leader (Hendriks 2010; Wisse 2014) while in majoritarian systems a leader’s sympathy rating seems to be more relevant (Langer 2010; Garzia 2011). Finally, we distinguish between two different forms of longevity whereby previous parliamentary and significant cabinet experience is used as the most relevant indicator in consensual systems, and time in office as a prime minister in more confrontational systems (Bovens et al. 2010). To assess Balkenende and Rutte’s scores on each of these indicators, a combination ↴ of primary and secondary sources like opinion polls, speeches, newspaper articles, biographies, and academic studies were used.

Results

Political/Policy Vision

Balkenende articulated a relatively strong and consistent vision for the future (score: 5). Deploring the state of the moral fabric of society, he advocated the reassertion of norms and values (Balkenende 2005b). A communitarian, he praised the self-organizing capacities of society and wanted a government supportive of those capacities (Het Elfde Uur 1998). Balkenende pitched this vision not to oppose, in opposition, a political opponent’s view but to critique society. His vision was first and foremost consensual (score: 4), continuously invoking common values and advocating dialogue as a means of binding people together (Balkenende 2005a).

In contrast, Rutte’s lack of vision and self-confessed pragmatism were a key part of his leadership style (Brandpunt 2012; 2015). He regularly voiced misgivings about ideological visions and visionary strategies, which in his eyes only got in the way of getting things done (Rutte 2011a; see also Bregman 2015). As such, Rutte scores low (score: 2) on policy vision. Instead, he is seen as a “lighthearted dealmaker” and purposeful bridge builder (Brandpunt 2015), who stresses common ties and shared goals and values. He is careful not to pitch himself, his party, or government against others (Rutte 2011b; 2012). Rutte thus embodies highly consensual political views (score: 5).

Communicative Performance

Balkenende was not seen as a gifted public speaker. In set-piece performances, he came across as formulaic and ill at ease (‘t Hart and Van Hooven 2004, p.10; Kleijwegt and Van Weezel 2013), in contrast to his more relaxed and engaging behavior in more intimate settings (score: 2). Balkenende lacked the ability to “sell” his communitarian vision in strong narratives (Vermaas 2001; Giesen 2009). His best-remembered metaphor, pleading for a return of the “Dutch East Indies Company-mentality,” backfired because it not only evoked an image of bold entrepreneurship, but also awkward memories of colonial exploitation and brutality (Braet 2007). Though Balkenende grew into a competent parliamentary debater and ran a very effective campaign against Wouter Bos in 2006, even his most loyal supporters admitted that he did not come across well on television (score: 3; Ten Hoove 2005).

Rutte’s social and interpersonal skills have received much acclaim. In addition to being considered open, accessible, and friendly, he is widely seen as ↴ being an effective communicator and debater (Broer and Niemantsverdriet 2011; Niemantsverdriet 2011; Niemantsverdriet and Versteegh 2012). Rutte always has his wits about him, does not dodge questions, and his language is clear and easy to understand. His way of

speaking commands attention, though expert critics have noted that Rutte uses “a lot of clichés, and only few compelling images” (Koelewijn and Koelewijn 2010). Rutte presented strong, coherent stories based on individualistic values. Not only has he been able to do this in election campaigns (van Zuydam and Hendriks 2015), but he was also awarded the “debater of the year award” twice (Dutch Debate Institute 2011). Rutte’s communicative performance was good in terms of ideological rhetoric and debating performance (score: 4), but markedly less so in terms of technocratic, evidence-based unifying rhetoric (score: 2).

Personal Poll Rating Versus Opposition Leaders

The scores for personal poll rating of the prime ministers versus the main opposition leader were calculated relative to their most likely opponent from the opposition at the time of polling. During Balkenende’s first and second terms, PvdA leader Wouter Bos was his main opponent. In January 2003, shortly before Balkenende’s second cabinet assumed office, Balkenende enjoyed ten percent more trust than Bos. As Table 9.2 shows, this figure had dropped to -22 percent three years later. However, Balkenende quickly bounced back to -4 (43 percent versus 47 percent for Bos) in September 2006. After the elections, trust in Balkenende rose to 51 percent, whereas all other potential opposition leaders achieved around 25 percent (Volkskrant 2003; Van Praag 2006; De Beer 2015). The sympathy scores of Balkenende show a different pattern. Throughout 2006, his sympathy scores relative to Bos were low to very low. Balkenende was characterized with words like “sound,” “fair,” or “honest,” whereas Bos elicited “sympathy” and was seen as “enthusiastic” (Algemeen Dagblad 2003).

Table 9.2. Balkenende’s trust and sympathy scores relative to opposition leaders

Date	01-03	02-06	09-06	11-06	Average
Trust	10%	-22%	-4%	7%	-2,25
LCI Score	4	1	3	4	3
Date	01-03	02-06	04-06	05-06	Average
Sympathy	-5%	-17,14%	-15,71%	-11,43%	-14.76
LCI Score	2	1	1	1	1

Rutte dealt with three different opposition leaders during his time in office. Eight months before his first cabinet, Rutte’s trust level was 10 percent lower than social liberal leader Pechtold’s trust level in February 2010, resulting in a low score of 2 (see Table 9.3). In the months after February, Social Democratic leader Job Cohen was welcomed enthusiastically into national politics, leaving Rutte with a new opposition leader and facing a -14 percent gap in April 2010. In just forty days, however, Rutte gained a 9 percent advantage, a score that stabilized over time (Van Praag 2010). Two years later, Rutte scored 7 percent higher than his main competitor of the day, left-wing socialist Roemer (Van Praag 2012). In sum, Rutte’s relative poll standings changed rapidly from low to moderate during his first term.

Table 9.3. Rutte's trust and sympathy scores relative to opposition leaders

Date	02-'10	04-'10	05-'10	05-'12	Average
Trust (difference)	-10%	-14%	11%	7%	-1,5
LCI Score	2	2	4	4	3
Date	02-'10	04-'10	05-'10		Average
Sympathy (difference)	-10%	-13%	-1%		-8
LCI Score	2	2	3		2

Longevity in Office

The LCI indicator of longevity in office refers to years in office as prime minister (Bennister et al. 2015). However, research indicates that time in office as member of parliament and (junior) minister provides considerable capital in leaders' quest to survive in office in the Netherlands (Bovens et al. 2010: 332). As Table 9.4 shows, the total time in office as prime minister for Balkenende by February 2007 was four and a half years (score: 5). In addition, Balkenende was seen as a political novice when he entered office. He served as a municipality councilor, as member of parliament for four years and as executive of the scientific council of the Christian Democratic Party before running for prime minister (score: 4; Van Weezel and Broer 2006a; Parliamentary Documentation Centre 2015a).

Table 9.4. Balkenende and Rutte: Time in office

Leader	Total time in office as PM	LCI score	Total time in office as MP and (junior) minister	LCI Score
Balkenende	4 years, 6 months	5	4 years	4
Rutte	1 year, 6 months	2	8 years, 6 months	5

Although Rutte's time in office as prime minister at the time of resignation was a year and a half resulting in a low LCI score of 2, he had over eight years of experience as both a member of parliament and as a junior minister (Korteweg 2015). In the Dutch political context, this means that Rutte had more time to learn the formal and informal rules of the political game than Balkenende (Bovens et al. 2010).

In the Netherlands, there are no set rules on how to appoint a party leader. Although there has been a trend towards the election of the party leaders by party members, leaders are often still put forward by party officials rather than appointed through a genuine competitive election. Balkenende, for instance, was elected party leader in 2001 after leadership rivalry between the incumbent and a challenger, which had threatened to divide the party. When both vacated the field, another stand off loomed, but the party elders intervened and Balkenende was made party leader (Van Weezel and Broer 2006a). His excellent result at the subsequent 2002 election removed any doubts about this choice and in 2006, the party elected Balkenende by acclamation for the party leadership in the upcoming elections, providing him with a “re-election” margin classified as high (score: 5; CDA 2006, p.4).

By contrast, Rutte’s rise to the Liberal party leadership in 2006 was the outcome of a long and intense struggle with the highly popular cabinet minister for immigration, Rita Verdonk. Rutte was elected by a close margin of 51.5 over 45.5 percent of the party conference votes. This did not end the leadership dispute, however. For in the parliamentary elections that followed, the Liberal party suffered a painful loss and Verdonk obtained more preferential votes than Rutte, a first in Dutch political history. Even though Verdonk was ousted from the party in 2007, it took Rutte more than five years to overcome the crisis (NPO 2013; Stokmans 2006; Trouw 2006). After this, Rutte enjoyed comfortable annual re-election to the leadership (VVD 2010; 2012; Algemeen Dagblad 2010; Staal 2011). All in all, Rutte’s election margin thus grew from moderate to large during the period under study (score: 5).

Party Polling Relative to Election Result

In the parliamentary elections of 2003, Balkenende’s Christian Democrats obtained 44 out of 150 seats in parliament (29.3 percent). Regardless of having won these elections, the Christian Democrats found themselves in a difficult position throughout the tenure of the resulting Cabinet, Balkenende II. On average, their party polling result relative to the last election result was -7.83 percent with a range between -12.67 and -5.33 percent, which corresponds to approximately 32 seats instead of the 44 they actually held (see Table 9.5). It was only after the dissolution of the Cabinet that the polls rose to a point approximating the parliamentary election results of 2003 (Allepeilingen 2015).

Table 9.5. Party polling relative to election result

Leader	Lowest polling result relative to election result	Highest polling result relative to election result	Average polling result relative to election result	LCI score
Balkenende	-12.67%	-5.33%	-7.83%	2
Rutte	-2.36%	3.89%	1.51%	3

Following the 2010 parliamentary elections, Rutte’s Liberal Party held 31 seats, one more than its biggest rival, the Social Democratic Party. During Rutte’s first Cabinet, the Liberal Party polled on average 1.51 percent higher than its 2010 result with a range between -2.36 and 3.89 percent (Louwerse 2014).

As Table 9.6 shows, public trust in Balkenende varied between 26 and 63 percent while his sympathy scores ranged between 48.57 and 63 percent. In other words, on average Balkenende was better liked than trusted by the Dutch people, but the difference was not statistically significant (Synovate 2010; De Beer 2015; Volkskrant 2003; Van Praag 2006). Rutte’s scores (Table 9.7) are lower on average but increase over time from 27 to 47 percent trust and 35 to 67 percent in terms of sympathy. Like Balkenende, Rutte was perceived to be more sympathetic than trustworthy but the difference between the scores was significantly larger (Van Praag 2010).

Table 9.6. Balkenende trust and sympathy scores

Date	01-‘03	02-‘06	09-‘06	11-‘06	Average	LCI Score
Trust	62%	26%	43%	51%	46%	3
Date	01-‘03	02-‘06	04-‘06	05-‘06		
Sympathy	63%	48.57%	50%	51.43%	53%	3

Table 9.7. Rutte trust and sympathy scores

Date	02-‘10	04-‘10	05-‘10	05-‘12	Average	LCI score
Trust	27%	36%	49%	47%	40%	2
Date	02-‘10	04-‘10	05-‘10			
Sympathy	35%	41%	67%		48%	3

Likelihood of Leadership Challenge

Balkenende became party leader of the CDA as a result of an internal leadership battle between two far better known and experienced party members (Van Weezel and Broer 2006a). However, although he started off as the compromise candidate, Balkenende rose to the challenge and turned out to be very effective in leading his party during a particularly tumultuous time in Dutch politics. So much so that when his first government resigned, the party decided to run for re-election with a campaign centered around his persona (CDA 2003, p.32). Afterwards, Balkenende was the undisputed leader of the CDA until his resignation in 2010 (CDA 2006; Staal 2008). All in all, his score in terms of the likelihood of leadership challenge was low (score: 5).

As indicated before, the rise to the party leadership of Rutte was accompanied by a long and intense struggle for power with the minister of immigration, Rita Verdonk. As the battle was fought out very publicly—an exception in Dutch politics—the challenge to Rutte’s leadership lingered on long after Verdonk was ousted from the party (NPO 2013; Stokmans 2006; Trouw 2006). Since then, Rutte’s lack of vision, the conservative direction of the party and, especially, the collaboration with the PVV has evoked strong criticism from important and long-serving members of the party (Versteegh 2012; Meijer 2010). However, fearing a rerun of the earlier leadership battle, the party bureau has been keen to contain these voices. Moreover, Rutte’s

electoral success has helped to ward off any further leadership challenges (Algemeen Dagblad 2010; Staal 2011). All in all, the likelihood of a leadership challenge during the period under study was low (score: 4).

Ability to Shape Party's Policy Platform

In the years before his premiership, Balkenende built a reputation for revitalizing his party's vision of society, and the societal role of government (Staal 2008). In fact, as a professor of Christian social philosophy and member of the Christian Democratic Scientific Bureau, he wrote several reports laying out policy positions in various domains (Van Weezel and Broer 2006a; 2006b). Balkenende thus had a major influence on the party's policy platform. However, developing the CDA policy vision was always a team effort. When in office, the group shaping the party platform included not only the prime minister, but, among others, a communication strategist, the party chairman, veteran ministers, and members of parliament. Nonetheless, Balkenende played a very important role in determining the content of policy (score: 4; Staal 2008).

By contrast, Rutte's hold on his party's policy platform was much more limited. Although under his leadership, prior to the 2010 elections, the party program was reformulated to focus more on traditional right-wing concerns like the economy, small government, security, and immigration, this effort was shaped by a group of party heavyweights rather than being masterminded by the leader (Staal 2011). Also, in 2012 when, after the fall of the Cabinet, the caretaker government had to come up with a budget for 2012, Rutte seems hardly to have played a role at all (Versteegh 2012). All in all, for this indicator his score is 2.

p. 176 Parliamentary Effectiveness

At the start of his second term, expectations of what Balkenende would be able to achieve in terms of legislation and policy were low. Political commentators qualified the coalition program as "all talk, no action," as concrete policy goals seemed to be missing (Volkskrant 2003). In hindsight, a more ambiguous picture emerges of Balkenende's parliamentary effectiveness. On the one hand, it seemed that the Liberal minister of finance, Gerrit Zalm was the main driver of policy in the government (Staal 2008; Vermaas 2002). On the other hand, Balkenende's command of parliament increased somewhat during his second term, and his government managed to obtain parliamentary support for several major reforms in the field of social insurance, pensions, and health care (score: 3; Bovenberg and Gradus 2008; Van den Braak 2014).

Rutte's first government was a minority government, a rarity in Dutch politics. This rarity makes it more difficult to assess its parliamentary effectiveness. Nonetheless, especially for a minority cabinet relying on support from different parties in the parliament for each decision, it was relatively successful. Against the odds, Rutte managed to rally support for both a mission to Afghanistan and for controversial pension reforms. Moreover, after the collapse of the first coalition, the caretaker government did manage to negotiate the 2012 budget in time to send it to the European Commission (a standard requirement under the so-called "European Semester"). Although one could equally attribute this result to the sense of responsibility shown by a group of parties making up the "constructive opposition" (Parliamentary Documentation Centre 2015b), Rutte's excellent people skills and negotiating style certainly helped in achieving some of the legislative successes (Niemantsverdriet and Versteegh 2012) and gained him a score of 4.

Conclusions

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In this chapter, the question was raised what leadership style the Dutch prime ministers Jan-Peter Balkenende and Mark Rutte applied that allowed both of them to consolidate their party leadership and prime-ministership after the premature collapse of their first coalition governments. Using the Leadership Capital Index, the first major finding of this study is that the leadership styles of both Balkenende and Rutte were characterized by a combination of consensual and confrontational leadership. In fact, Balkenende achieves a total score of 16 on the consensual indicators and 17 on the confrontational indicators, while Rutte scores 17 on the consensual indicators and 13 on the confrontational indicators. This result provides a first plausibility probe for the hypothesis that in the changing political culture of the Netherlands, Dutch political leaders have an incentive to supplement the traditional consensus-building with elements of a more confrontational leadership style.

A closer comparison of Balkenende and Rutte's scores (see Table 9.8) on the different indicators reveals, however, that politicians do have considerable leeway in how to strike that balance. In terms of their soft skills, for instance, Balkenende put forward a vision that was both consensual and transformative, but lacked the communication skills to deliver his message. Still, he managed to secure re-election. Rutte on the other hand, espoused a predominantly process-oriented cooperative vision that was neither transformational nor radical enough to set him apart from his opponents, but managed to derive leadership capital from his excellent relational skills and communication. In a similar vein, Balkenende scored much higher on expertise, while Rutte was seen as more sympathetic.

Table 9.8. Balkenende and Rutte LCI scores

No	Indicator	Balkenende		Rutte	
		Consensual	Confrontational	Consensual	Confrontational
S1–01	Political/policy vision	4	5	5	2
S1–02	Communicative performance	2	3	2	4
S2–03	Personal poll rating	3	1	3	2
S2–04	Longevity	4	5	5	2
S2–05	Re-election margin for the party leadership	5		5	
R1–06	Party polling relative to most recent election result	2		3	
R1–07	Levels of public trust/sympathy in leader	3	3	2	3
R1–08	Likelihood of credible leadership challenge	5		4	
R2–09	Perceived ability to shape party's policy platform	4		2	
R2–10	Perceived parliamentary effectiveness of leader	3		4	
Total non-generic indicators		16	17	17	13
TOTAL		35	36	35	31

Interestingly, Balkenende and Rutte's LCI scores show that even though there is an equal amount of contextualized and generic indicators, their scores on the generic indicators are higher. This suggests that their success was based to a considerable extent on skills, relations, and reputations associated with strong political capital in all democratic political systems, such as achieving pre-eminence within their own parties (high scores on the re-election margin for party leadership and low likelihood of an imminent leadership challenge). Since Balkenende and Rutte and their parties polled relatively badly throughout much of the two periods studied, this suggests that in the Netherlands even unpopular prime ministers may endure as long as they maintain good and constructive relations with their coalition partners and the "constructive opposition" in parliament. Peer-oriented, backstage leadership skills, relations, and reputation appear to remain more important than mass-oriented ones. Clearly, even in an era of polarizing, mediatized politics, the Netherlands is still a long way from the increasingly personalized and confrontational political ecosystem of contemporary Westminster systems.

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