

3

PUBLIC MANAGEMENT AND POLITICS

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Central government personnel usually await the advent of a new minister with curiosity as to how long it will take them to educate the minister to lead the bureaucracy and to accept departmental policy views. When dealing with the relationship between public management and politics one is immediately caught up in the intricacies of political theory, constitutional traditions and orthodox administrative science views, which customarily treat the problem under consideration in the framework of the institutional politics-administration dichotomy. Although most administrative scientists today might agree that this classical framework is a descriptively misleading conception of two separate realms of politics and administration, we can hardly abandon the dichotomy for theoretical reasons, as we might run into difficulties when trying to draw organization charts with horizontal lines to indicate hierarchical relationships or having top executives sit on the ground floor of their office building and the clerks on the top.

In this chapter I shall take as a first vantage point the traditional conceptualization of the politics-administration dichotomy relating to Max Weber, using it to analyse empirically some aspects of the complicated functional relationship between top administrators and executive politicians and the predominance of rather classical or political, even managerialist role understanding. First, it is useful to draw attention to the historical differentiation of the polity that brought about the institutional separation of powers and led to the emergence of a distinct politician and a *classical* administrator role, often under pre-democratic regimes. Second, in a functional analysis, the implicit means-end and facts-values dichotomy will be confronted with empirical findings revealing the degree of objective involvement of top administrators in the democratic political process, thus suggesting a rather *political* role understanding. Subsequently, I shall deal with a widespread development induced by politicians since the 1970s: party politicisation, interpreted as a mechanisms for politically controlling bureaucracy. Finally I shall discuss if the managerialist revolution in some countries in the 1980s has once again affected the role understanding

of top administrators, and if so whether a *managerialist* role understanding is helpful in solving the perennial political control problem or rather tends to disguise it.

POLITY DIFFERENTIATION AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE CLASSICAL ROLE UNDERSTANDING

The politics-administration dichotomy is intellectually rooted in the doctrine of separation of powers as a system of political checks and balances, in which the executive branch draws its legitimacy from Parliament. It is not merely a normative theory which has a strong bearing on most civil service codes and in particular implies that the neutral execution of written law should guide administrative decision-making. But it also reflects the change undergone by most Western political systems during the last two centuries: the coming into existence of Parliaments and political parties, organized interest groups and mass media. The absolutist state on the continent was transformed and the polity differentiated into various subsystems, among which bureaucracy remained as but one, albeit important, power centre exposed to an increasing number of conflicting interests and rivalling expectations.

The absolutist bureaucracy, for instance in Prussia, was occasionally far from being merely the obedient servant of the king's 'personal regime' but was itself rather an agglomeration of conflicting provincial and societal interests. With the advent of constitutional monarchy, even more within republican states and competitive party systems, the relationship between 'political master and staff for domination', to put it in Max Weber's terms, became more complicated. Whereas under absolutist rule top administrators were often politicians and ministers juridically civil servants, roles became formally differentiated as (at least prime) ministers were elected and supported by a parliamentary majority and stayed in office for a limited number of years. The by then tenured, professionally trained, appointed and salaried full-time civil servant who went through a career to the top of the administrative hierarchy, faced the elected party politician and transitory amateur as his political master, who after the introduction of equal suffrage sometimes came from the working-class. The ministerial bureaucracy, predominantly recruited from the nobility and still monarchist in orientation, as in Germany after 1919, adhered to the classical role model of neutral execution of the law, particularly when they saw themselves serving 'the state' and mediating partial interests as wardens of the commonweal.

On the other hand, both groups of politico-administrative actors have become assimilated, since politicians, as Max Weber had already observed, increasingly tended rather to 'live from politics than to live for politics'. Despite this professionalization of politicians, the career path of both elite groups remained quite distinct with a predictable career and job security in the one case and more 'entrepreneurial', competitive, uncertain

political careers and transitory maintenance of top positions in the case of politicians.

There are, though, marked national differences in the degree to which there is horizontal career mobility between the realms and arenas of politics and administration, depending basically on the institutional safeguards developed to secure the neutrality of the civil service. Whereas some countries practise total ineligibility and even non-affiliation with political parties as a norm (Great Britain and the United States), others allow public servants to become members of political parties as their civil right and even to run election campaigns while formally in office (e.g. in Germany and France). However, these different recruitment patterns for political positions do not necessarily have a direct influence on a classical versus a more political role understanding of top administrators if these continue to be recruited from the career service. For, where bureaucracy, like in central Europe, is historically older than democracy (and not the other way round like in the US), there is still a strong tendency to emphasize expertise bread in a career civil service over political responsiveness.

Obviously, there exists a goal conflict between preserving neutrality, non-partisanship (historically: incorruptibility) and expertise in particular with respect to executive agencies, and, on the other hand, securing the political responsiveness of the ministerial bureaucracy to leading politicians. This is at the roots of party politicisation of personnel policy I am going to deal with below. Also, to the extent the notion of linkage rather than separation of powers applies better in systems of parliamentary government, the actual threshold between politics and administration is located somewhere below the top executive position; the exact borderline, again, depends on the extent to which political criteria may be or actually are applied in staffing these positions.

TOP ADMINISTRATORS AND POLITICIANS IN THE POLICY PROCESS

What in an institutional perspective means the separation of powers or – more generally speaking – differentiation of the polity, in an organizational perspective it implies the emergence of at least two distinct types of positions and actors. Weber (1919) in particular pointed out that politicians act in public and in Parliament as their arena, while administrators stay in offices and on boards; that politicians' medium is voice, whereas bureaucrats rely on the written word and records; that politicians' imperative is the fight for power as opposed to the obedience of disciplined officials working 'sine ira et studio'. Furthermore, Weber regarded the typical politician as an actor who tries to persuade and to convince people, with passion and occasionally with charisma; the administrator, on the other hand, was supposed to argue, to be a scientifically trained problem-solver opposed to the preference changer; and s/he – in principle – would play this role impassionately and impersonally.¹

Clearly, these characteristics refer to the policy process and to the functioning of both groups of actors in politics. Rather than the original Weberian theory of political domination, organization sociologists have emphasized an additional implication: politicians are regarded as the goal-setters, while administrators are supposed to select adequate means to achieve those goals and to implement political visions. In other words: politicians cope with what may be called *normative complexity*, while the function of civil servants can be seen as reducing *factual uncertainty* by relying on routines and applying professional expertise stored in the records. In this view only politicians are in a position to bring about *substantive rationality*, whereas civil servants produce at best *formal rationality*.

The means-ends and facts-value dichotomies are, however, logical distinctions highly inappropriate for conceptualizing the interaction between politician and administrator. They reflect the logic of legitimating administrative decisions rather than depicting the legitimating process. Nevertheless, this does not exclude that administrators perceive themselves in these terms. Together with the policy-administration distinction and the facts-value dichotomy the means-end distinction is obviously at the core of the classical role understanding.² In its reference to the decision-making paradigm, it can serve us, however, also as a starting point from which to shed some light on the mutual functioning of political and administrative actors in the decision process, irrespective of self-perception and beyond those characteristics Weber had regarded as typical.

A good deal of what a ministry does – apart from policy implementation and control of the implementation process – is devising new policies and programmes, which often have to be legislated. Given that these new policies are innovative, that they are incremental or pre-programmed by previous decisions, the initiatives for dealing with a problem, defining it and devising (alternative) ways to solve it, often originate in the operative sections at the bottom of the ministerial hierarchy. Of course, to a certain degree, the decision-making process is fuelled by problems and policy proposals from party and election programmes; but already government declarations are regularly a *mixtum compositum* of political initiatives and bureaucratic suggestions. In any case, political initiatives from above and bureaucratic proposals from the bottom have to be mediated into the operating units and on to the political layer, respectively. Gearing each side to the other is basically the function of the two top administrative levels in the hierarchy. For top administrators this means either to operationalize policy goals, to specify the basically normative decision premises, and to anticipate constraints as well as political feasibility, or to filter initiatives from below through perceived or anticipated decision premises of the minister. Even routine matters, which normally would not involve the minister but are decided by officials, have to be evaluated with respect to potential political repercussions.

Matching political preferences and administrative professional and procedural expertness requires vertical communication. Contrary to the classical mechanistic model of hierarchical top-down decision-making and bottom-up reporting, the process of adjusting normative and factual decision premises is a dynamic, iterating process (Mayntz and Scharpf, 1975: 100). In addition, it is highly selective, as the intensity of vertical communication varies with each stage in the process and with issue salience. While entire divisions in a ministry may work on 'auto-pilot' (Rose, 1985: 3), there are always issues that attract particular political attention, that is those for which the minister is held accountable, with which he identifies, and through which he wants to become renowned as a competent policy-maker. In these instances the intensity of communication between division heads and minister will increase.

Not only are top civil servants more involved in internal vertical communication, but the frequency of external contacts with other ministries, including the office of the head of government, to parliamentary bodies, interest group representatives and press relations, increases the higher the rank of the civil servant (Aberbach et al., 1981: 209 ff). The arena of policy-making changes, too, as we move up the hierarchy: whereas the operative units basically communicate with sections in other departments or with subordinate authorities and exchange information, top administrators are more likely to be engaged in parliamentary or cabinet committees (often accompanied by section heads to assist them) or – depending on the political culture – occasionally to appear in public; even more so does, of course, the politician. A German minister often spends only one-third of his working hours in his department (Wagener, 1971: 6). While his function is predominantly representing and 'selling' departmental policy in order to reach a consensus and secure party support as his most important political resource, the top civil servant is rather involved in resolving conflicts, which are engendered in lower-level internal and external communications. The mechanism to shift controversial matters up the hierarchy, which is well known from the process of settling budgetary disputes, also shifts power upwards. So far the decision patterns follow the management-by-exception model. As the typical form of conflict resolution, bargaining implies changing the political preference structure. Thus, this power shift mechanism (Downs, 1967) serves politically to control lower-level co-ordination and transports consensus building on to hierarchical levels, which are normally more informed about the politician's willingness and limitations to compromise, and are better legitimized to bargain.

Only the most essential matters then are referred to the minister for decision, whereas issues of minor political importance are accomplished by top administrators. This function of filtering the vertical flow of information presupposes that top administrators have developed the sensitivity to recognize what might be of political importance and should be reported to the political top.

There is, however, not merely a gradual, but also a qualitative difference between top administrators and politicians when it comes to managing a department with respect to organizing, staffing and budgeting. Not taking into account those ministries which are functionally specialized within government to deal with budgeting (Finance, Treasury) or staffing (Civil Service Department) as their professional policy field, management tasks within a department are to fulfil subsidiary functions for policy development and long-term maintenance functions for the effectiveness of the apparatus, independent of specific governments and their policies. It might be a generalization to say that politicians are involved in management functions merely in cases which again are defined as exceptional (setting overall budgetary priorities or bargaining a percentage of budget cut-backs with the finance minister) or which formally have to be authorized (major reorganizations). Of course, there are differences between ministers with respect to their management capabilities and interests, but in general the initiatives originate in the department and proposals are elaborated in close contact with the top civil servant before a minister is informed or gets involved.

It is, one could say, the privilege of the permanent top administrator as opposed to the parliamentary secretary of state or the minister, to control management decisions implying the maintenance of administrative resources. Only to the extent that these questions have an important bearing on substantive policy matters is the minister asked for a decision or takes an active stand in them, although it is questionable whether politicians care about organizational matters for more than symbolic reasons (March and Olson, 1983). Complementary, it is rather the top administrator who considers the resource implications of substantive policy issues. Undoubtedly, though, politicians are seriously concerned with the appointment of their closest collaborators, the top administrators.

The importance of management decisions in shaping the role of the top administrator does not mean that such administrators are preoccupied with management problems; their involvement in policy development is regularly too time-consuming to specialize solely in the 'administration of administration'.

This so far stylized picture is more complicated in reality, taking into account that often there can be more top actors involved in the running of a department. Owing to the increasing number of public tasks and the expansion of central government departments in most European countries, the number not only of top administrative but also of political positions has grown. Some German departments acquired additional secretaries of state in the late 1960s, and in Britain deputy secretaries of state were introduced. Furthermore, staff units occasionally fulfil important co-ordinating functions instead of top line administrators, most prominently so in Belgium and in France (Thuillier, 1982).

When staff units take over co-ordinating functions or more top political positions are installed, departmental management tends to deviate from

the classical monocratic model. The function of, say, a German secretary of state as departmental co-ordinator might change into that of a super-division head, occasionally even allowing the parliamentary secretary of state to concentrate on management functions in the narrow sense (Mayntz and Scharpf, 1975: 86). As the relationships at the top of a ministry are seldom formalized and co-operation to a great extent depends on the personalities of the actors, formally monocratic political authority can in fact be transformed into collegial modes of leadership. When the configurations become more complex, formal positional differences are blurred and the qualification of actors as rather political or bureaucratic is even more difficult in terms of their empirical function in the policy process.

Whatever the actual configuration, top civil servants have a broader range of political discretion than would have been attributed to them in the classical notion (Mayntz, 1984a; b). Empirical evidence available also from opinion surveys among the administrative elite shows that the ministerial bureaucracy in toto and the role of the top administrator are functionally political. Although the majority of the administrative elite in Bonn, in 1987 as well as 17 years before, perceive their role as rather distinct from that of politicians, the majority in 1987 liked the inevitable political aspects of their job very much (78.5 per cent), as opposed to only 45.2 in 1970 (Mayntz and Derlien, 1989: 394). This political role understanding coincides with tolerance for politics and a low level of technocratic thinking (Aberbach et al., 1990).

POLITICAL CONTROL BY PERSONNEL POLICY

Is the high compatibility of subjective role understanding of top administrators and (parliamentary) politicians brought about by their operating in a functionally politicized context? Is political role understanding, so to speak, automatically produced once ideologies and myths have become unbearable? Presupposing such an automatism, which would result in pre-stabilized harmony of both sets of actors, could lead us to underestimate the problem of politically controlling a huge bureaucratic apparatus like a government department and preventing it from emancipating itself from its political master. Even when excluding from our consideration cases of bureaucratic disloyalty or sabotage, information leaks and withholding information from a minister, the political responsibility of a minister today cannot be fully exerted, as the complexity of tasks and openness of decision-making prevent him from knowing everything that goes on in his department. The law of requisite variety limits his attention and information-processing capacity vis-à-vis an apparatus of overwhelming expertise, renders political control necessarily selective, and enables the bureaucracy to become politically self-controlling, as Max Weber had already observed. The politician, therefore, will tend to broaden his control capacity.

One way to do this is to build up staff units; the French *cabinets ministeriels* are the prototype for a structural solution to increase political control capacity. However, they have resulted in an impairment of the top executive's line authority. In most European countries and the United States, furthermore, the staff solution can rather be observed on the level of the chief of government in order to secure inter-departmental co-ordination (Rose and Suleiman, 1980).

Another solution observable in a number of countries consists of superimposing more genuine politicians on to a closed civil service career system with immobility of top executives. The politically neutralized, although not apolitical, Whitehall bureaucracy then might function quite smoothly, because there is a great number of MP's appointed to political executive positions; certainly, the sixty sub-cabinet positions and thirty-six unpaid parliamentary private secretaries also serve a patronage function for the parliamentary faction (Rose, 1980: 6), but they do enable ministers to delegate external relations and to broaden the internal political control capacity. Increasing the number of political appointees in the executive branch may, however, create co-ordination problems as well as problems of balancing the division of labour in departmental management mentioned earlier.

A functional alternative as well as an additional device to enhance the control capacity of ministers over their bureaucratic staff is the selective promotion of political trustees within the civil service career system. Be it in staffing the ministerial cabinet, or in appointing top line administrators, ministers all over the world try to select those candidates whom they regard as valuable collaborators in the policy process, because they supposedly share normative convictions with the minister. This congeniality reduces the need to communicate normative political decision premises and allows the politician to rely on the candidate's political self-control. Selective, politically motivated promotion is possible even in a closed career system, as the post-1979 change in personnel policy in Whitehall indicates (Ridley, 1985; Rose, 1988). The widest range of politically motivated staffing is notorious in the American spoils system (Hecllo, 1977; Fesler, 1983; Mackenzie, 1987) where political appointees as well as the senior executive service can be removed from office and new trustees appointed to vacancies from within and without the career service.

Countries like France and Germany know merely the 'political civil servants', who can be temporarily retired, an institution that is particularly made use of after changes in government (Derlien, 1984; 1988). Here vacancies are predominantly, though not exclusively, filled with insiders. Of course, with public employees instead of tenured civil servants (as is partly the case with the personnel in French cabinets) it is even easier to purge important positions. The most modest form of gearing top career civil servants to the political requirements of the day is to reshuffle them and bring those looked at with disgrace into politically less sensitive positions. If reshuffling is not possible because of strict immobility, new

positions might be established and filled with trustees in order to circumvent or control mistrusted office-holders.

These are not only the basic mechanisms for practically substituting communicated political decision premises by socialized convictions; in my view they also contribute to an explanation of why top administrators on average fit into a functionally politicized environment and exhibit a role understanding which is, notwithstanding recognition of basic functional difference, compatible and partly congruent with that of politicians. The wide range of informal devices available for political control by personnel policy could also help to explain why there are hardly any national differences in the subjective role understanding of top civil servants despite different formal prescriptions for recruitment into top administrative positions (Putnam, 1973; Aberbach et al. 1981). But it is also arguable that strong involvement of civil servants in the democratic policy process, i.e. *functional politicisation*³ per se furthers a political role understanding irrespective of party patronage.

Pointing out the functional relationship between party politicisation and the development of a political role understanding, must though not lead us to overlook the potential negative long-term systemic impact of universal increasing party patronage on recruitment, motivation and expertise of a career civil service.⁴

POLITICAL CONTROL, MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES AND MANAGERIALISM

Having elaborated the political environment of top administrators, their functional involvement in the policy process, their concomitantly accepting a more or less political role understanding, and various mechanisms of personnel policy which to a certain extent might have brought about a fit between these elements, we return to systemic questions. From a functionalist point of view, we can clearly observe a high degree of interpenetration of the legislative and the executive subsystems of the polity (Mayntz, 1983). The more politicians hold functions in both of the systems, the more top administrators subjectively and objectively share segments of their role with that of their minister, the more they engage in political parties, gain parliamentary mandates and are appointed as top administrators because of these very properties, the more politics and ministerial bureaucracy (formerly differentiated systems socially and career-wise) become de-differentiated. At least, the borderline between the two systems has shifted deeper, downwards into the executive branch. To the extent that party membership over-rides expertise as the decisive criterion for recruitment into top administrative positions, one could even state a regression of the system towards neo-feudalism akin to its eighteenth-century state, when ascribed properties like social class or family bonds were dominant recruitment criteria.

On the other hand, it is arguable that the systems are still being kept

separate, as political and administrative careers are distinct and inter-sectoral mobility is low or one-sided, as long as (junior and lower) civil servants enter politics. What may have appeared as de-differentiation or regression, then, could also be interpreted as a state of the system, in which internal complexity has been increased by mutually incorporating elements of the other system in order to cope with the increased complexity of the administrative and political environment, respectively. Functional role differentiation within Parliament (bureaucratic skills and positions) and within administration (political roles and skills) require yet more complex forms of information processing.

It is within this context together with the general trend of expanding state activities that the various attempts to improve the manageability of the executive branch since the late 1960s are rooted and can be understood. Integrated planning and budgeting systems of the PPBS type, cost-benefit analyses, and programme evaluation were meant to rationalize policy and policy-making in order to replace traditional piece-meal engineering, incrementalism and adhocery by goal-oriented, comprehensive and long-range planning. Management by objectives, performance appraisal, payment schemes and new recruitment and staffing procedures have been brought about by civil service reforms aimed at increasing productivity in government. These reforms (Caiden and Siedentopf, 1982), however, often failed, were implemented half-heartedly or later reduced, leaving the traditional system basically as it was before – except for the increased number of staff positions as well as analytical specialists in these positions. Among the multiple reasons for the failure of most reform attempts, two are of theoretical significance here. Planning systems, which follow the logic of decision-making and aim at comprehensiveness, were bound to fail within a turbulent political environment creating contradictory and unstable normative preferences incompatible with established executive plans. Secondly, organizational models and instruments for personnel policy as well as decision tools were often borrowed from business administration and followed the logic of hierarchical, closed decision-making inappropriate to the open system of politics and the cognitive uncertainties and fragmented powers operating there. Therefore, the hope of coping with the problem of politically controlling the ministerial bureaucracy by introducing management techniques and by moulding the role of the top administrators towards the model of the manager in private industry was shattered. Top administrators remained 'reduced' politicians, and these management techniques, as far as they were perpetuated, were carried out by people in staff units. The dilemma still is that, on the one hand, they strengthen the control capacity of the top vis-à-vis the apparatus, and on the other hand the control problem is duplicated, although to a lesser degree, in the ancient question of who is to control the controllers.

Nevertheless, in the 1980s civil service reforms were launched and carried through, which in some countries were part of the broader strategy

of 'rolling back the frontiers of the state' by emphasizing economizing the public sector, decentralization and privatisation – in other words: reducing complexity. This new '*managerialism*' (Aucoin, 1988; Hood et al., 1988) is controversial not only for the privatisation aspect but also for its potential unforeseen consequences exactly for the relationship between bureaucracy and polity. In particular, questions of role definition (budgetary responsibility and political accountability) in a more decentralized structure are raised. Of utmost practical concern seem to be also payment questions and the declining attractiveness of the civil service in Britain (Rose, 1988) and even in France (Rouban, 1989; Montricher, 1991), as it had been in the US since the introduction of merit pay and with increasing politicisation (Levine, 1988).

Leaving the higher civil service for an economic career is more likely today owing to the managerialist role model and to relative pay deficiencies, where the social status of the civil service is losing its former exclusiveness. Motivational reactions of civil servants toward a changing working climate and impaired civil service morale as results of these policies seem to be inevitable (Peters, 1991). Although it is not exactly clear what is rhetoric of civil service policy and initial reception in the service and what its lasting effects on the basic features of the system are, it appears that those top administrators who were involved in implementing privatisation and QUANGOization policies did so adopting a managerial role model to meet deadlines, targets and market conditions. Yet, this particular emphasis did not necessarily imply the emergence of a 'third kind' of role understanding, for these policies had to be devised and implemented in an environment politicized as ever.⁵ That managerialism in the ministerial bureaucracies could be a temporal phenomenon, would explain why, according to recent reports,⁶ things have less dramatically changed than initially expected.

However, the introduction of performance pay systems based on individual contracts with top administrators in particular in large public enterprises in most European countries is an indication of changing career patterns; recruitment of private managers and transfer of public managers into private – and preferably recently privatized – enterprises becomes more likely and could fundamentally change role understanding – less so on the classical-political dimension, but rather on the so far unquestioned dimension of public versus private orientation of top administrators. Most importantly, though, the problems of politically controlling the public sector will by no means diminish; decentralization is colliding with the notion of ministerial accountability, and individual performance contracts pose the well-known problems of performance measurement (Laegrid, 1993). The experience with management techniques in the 1970s should be reason enough to be prepared for instrumental failures. Like the previous reforms engendered lasting structural effects, the recent managerialist experiments could have unforeseen consequences as well in altering recruitment patterns and role understanding.

Notes

- 1 Max Weber in 1917 opposed the recruitment of ministers from the ranks of bureaucracy (Beamtenherrschaft) and in that took a stance totally different from what Woodrow Wilson intended for the USA at about the same time: to secure the emerging professional bureaucracy independence vis-à-vis the democratic spoils system.
- 2 This corresponds to 'images' 1 and 2 in Aberbach et al. (1981: 4-9), while their other two 'images' derive functions in the policy process. Aberbach and Rockman (1988), in revisiting the 'pure hybrid' (image 4) emphasize that they conceptualized this type also with a view at atypical recruitment and staffing of novel positions. It should be noted that Putnam (1973) developed his juxtaposition of classical and political bureaucrats from attitudinal measures of tolerance for politics, programmatic commitment and elitism. Therefore, as a methodological consequence in this ongoing debate one should carefully distinguish the levels of self-perception and attitudinal orientations from functional descriptions and objective recruitment patterns.
- 3 See, for the distinction between party and functional politicization as well as a subjectively political role understanding, Renate Mayntz and Hans-Ulrich Derlien (1989).
- 4 However, it is advisable to distinguish between facts and fables of the phenomenon (Derlien, 1985; Stahlberg, 1987).
- 5 Indicatively, despite some emphasis on privatisation in Germany, a managerial accentuation of administrative role understanding similar to that in the Commonwealth countries was not observed (Derlien 1991).
- 6 As to the UK, Fry (1988) stated a good deal of stability despite the Thatcher reforms and Wilson (1991) envisages a return to the pre-Thatcher civil service likely.