



Article

The craft of public administration in Eurasia

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Abstract

In an innovative approach, applied to a region of the world on which research remains in its infancy, this article identifies the dominant administrative reform traditions embedded within the administrative elites responsible for administrative reform in Eurasia. Our contribution is twofold. Firstly, we establish a mechanism for measuring bureaucrat perceptions of administrative reform that may be replicated in other regions, by identifying the extent to which the three dominant Western traditions of public service (traditional public administration, new public management and new public governance) have been embedded in Eurasian societies. The article thereby demonstrates the effectiveness of these turns in public administration to be 'learned' and become embedded within the psyche of elite-level bureaucrats in these Eurasian post-Soviet regimes. The article posits that, while members of these elites hold several common governance perceptions, understanding of administrative reform differs markedly between bureaucrats and is broadly aligned with various aspects of the three dominant turns in public administration. Therefore, it is recommended that some rebalancing needs to take place between international/regional public policy interventions and public administration interventions. While public policy interventions are of course required, the administrative foundations upon which they are built (or learned), require greater attention to the needs, skills and attitudes of practitioners.

Keywords

Administrative reform, Central Asia, Eurasia, governance, new public management, traditional public administration

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Introduction

Broadly, the past 50 years have seen three public administration models cum reform traditions advocated by Western scholars, each advocating a different role for the government official or bureaucrat. The result is that officials have received mixed messages as to how they should fit into the metaphorical machine of government. In this article, we investigate how the bureaucratic elite interpret the term administrative reform, and identify the key motivations supporting their behaviours. ‘Popular stereotypes and scholarly depictions do not provide a clear understanding of how administrators perceive their roles and responsibilities or how they use their considerable discretionary powers’ (de Graaf, 2011: 285; Selden et al., 1999: 172). We therefore probe the conceptual foundations upon which bureaucrats build their role conceptions. The research addresses the practical questions of administrative reform that inform the policy adoption and implementation process in Eurasia, a region experiencing pronounced change following the collapse of the Soviet Union, but which remains relatively under-investigated.

Why does a conception of administrative reform matter?

Responding directly to the concerns of those interested in why policy transfer or ‘translation’ may fail (Dunlop, 2017; Stone, 2017), our research focuses not on the learning process, but on the basics of what knowledge is being updated, through which we shed light on Dunlop’s original concern of why learners may fail to learn or indeed, learn differently. Put differently, while a bureaucrat’s beliefs may be updated through learning, how they internalise learning is predicated upon their normative beliefs about what their role should be. The nature of policy learning depends on one’s conception of public administration: lessons, similarly taught, are internalised differently, based on one’s conceptions of administrative reform. To what extent do Western conceptions of administrative exist among elite-level bureaucrats?

Our research draws upon the three main traditions of public administration and service: New Public Management (NPM), New Public Governance (NPG) and Traditional Public Administration (TPA), as revived by Rhodes’ (2016) recent scholarship. Within Eurasia, the research is situated within an emerging transnational network of elite-level bureaucrats tasked with reforming the public administrations of their respective countries: the Regional Hub of Civil Service in Astana, a regional United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) initiative that aims to increase the effectiveness of civil service systems in Central Asia. Through partnerships and networking, it uses soft power to build administrative capacity through peer-to-peer learning.

The article does not appraise the qualities of NPM, NPG or Rhodes’ ‘Craft skills’ (based on the traditional model). Rather, it accepts that these ideal-types are theoretically existent within the public sector. These attributes have been developed over a number of years, with training supported by numerous interventions from national, regional and international agencies. The article explores how the values of

each of these administrative reform agendas are interpreted and internalised by bureaucrats in Eurasia. As these reform agendas compete, there is no dominant 'reform agenda' or state narrative; *latent narratives* would, therefore, be expected to come to the fore (Callahan and Olshfski, 2006) and guide decision making in instances of discretion (Meier and O'Toole, 2006). What are these learning platforms upon which policy learning takes place?

The next section outlines briefly the three dominant traditions of administrative reform, leading to the development of a set of indicators for measuring the dominance of each of these traditions within a civil service. After a description of our research methodology, we present the findings of the study, followed by a short discussion and some concluding remarks.

Theoretical framework

Administrative reform suffers from that oft cited problem of pareto-efficient policies: one cannot be against administrative reform – however, what is meant by the term 'administrative reform' or an administrative reform agenda differs across time and across place, or what Radaelli (2005) refers to as new wine bottles with either no wine or wine of variant quality inside. Rather than focusing on conceptions of the state or administrative traditions of the state (Loughlin and Peters, 1997; Loughlin et al., 2011), we have focused on the three dominant turns in public administration research that have been compiled by Rod Rhodes (2016). Based on Osborne (2010), Rhodes (1998), Bryson et al. (2014) and Rhodes (2016), the section below summarises the key aspects of the (i) NPM, (ii) NPG and (iii) what Rhodes has defined as the 'Craft' agenda, based on the traditional model of public administration (see also Robinson, 2015).

Narrative for theoretical type 1: NPM

Proponents of NPM are most concerned with government failures; they distrust big government and believe in the efficacy and efficiency of markets and rationality, and devolution of authority to as close as possible to the citizen (or customer). NPM has its roots in public choice theory (see, e.g. Breton, 1974; Buchanan and Tullock, 1962; Downs, 1957, 1967; Dunleavy, 1991; Niskanen, 1971, 1973; Tullock, 1965, 1976), blending thinking from both pluralist and New Right paradigms. Proponents favoured economic theory and positivist social science methodologies. Regulation of service provision was to be one of the primary tasks of government. While NPM remains a far from coherent doctrine (Hood, 1991), there are a number of traits associated with it. NPM advocates citizens as consumers and sees competition between consumers as a way of ensuring organisational accountability (Bryson et al., 2014: 446; Osborne, 2010; Rhodes, 2016). The belief that private-sector efficiencies could be incorporated into the public sector underpinned this reform agenda. Many NPM practices are still evident, and even being perpetuated and promoted within civil service systems today: performance related pay

and key performance indicators are seen as effective mechanisms for increasing performance levels. The recruitment of senior civil servants and ‘Tsars’ from the private sector, it is argued, reduces inefficiencies. Government should be small, regulating minimally the multiple service providers that should compete with each other for funding. In short, governments should ‘steer, not row’: they should make policy, but others should implement it. Many NPM advocates would support the idea of supporting the business environment directly as a means of improving conditions in society. Many of these policies and traditions remain embedded within government practices although the heydays for NPM were the 1970s and 1980s. Overall, the reforms espoused by the NPM agenda have been unconvincing in terms of their effects on productivity and effectiveness within the civil service (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011: 180–181).

Narrative for theoretical type 2: NPG

NPG has its origins in institutional and network theory. It advocates that the bureaucracy works with partners in society – nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs). It emphasises the importance of values and relationships between people, organisations and interests. It is these networks that influence values which, in turn, influence resource allocation. Civil servants should have good mediation skills, encouraging cooperation between ministries, departments, civil society organisations and the private sector. If a Minister’s policy outcome transcends departments, civil servants should be sufficiently networked to propose and deliver ‘joined-up’ government. The emphasis in NPG is on *better* regulation, as opposed to *less* regulation. Civil servants should take the initiative in proposing solutions to policy problems that they encounter; they should take ownership of policy programmes, ensuring policies are well designed and implemented. Their key task is to manage relationships. NPG also differs from NPM in that it contends that productivity performance in the public sector is related to ‘public service motivation’ as opposed to material rewards. As the failures of NPM became apparent in the early 1990s, Dutch and Anglo schools of NPG emerged, both advocating a range of social actors in the policy process (Peters and Pierre, 2000). Much of this literature has focused on the participation of various groups in the decision-making process. The essential argument is that the more engaged bureaucrats are with users, the more they will understand their needs and design a policy programme accordingly, leading to more effective outputs of government.

Narrative for theoretical type 3: The craft of public administration

TPA theory has its roots in political science and sociology. Based variously on practical developments such as the Northcote–Trevelyan report (1854), and the writings of Weber (in Rheinstein and Shils, 1954) and Wilson (1887), it had a strong focus on meritocracy, the policy process and policy implementation. TPA was the dominant tradition of public administration in Westminster systems

of government, until the arrival of NPM. The bureaucrat is seen as the sole source of advice to the Minister and resource decisions are arrived at through a strict hierarchical process. Bureaucrats are guided by a public sector ethos. Rhodes' (2016) and Bryson et al.'s (2014) revisioning of the traditional model argues that '[w]hile efficiency was the main concern of TPA, and efficiency and effectiveness are the main concerns of NPM, values beyond efficiency and effectiveness are pursued, debated, challenged, and evaluated in the emerging approach. In this regard, the emerging approach re-emphasizes and brings to the fore value-related concerns of previous eras that were always present but not dominant' (Bryson et al., 2014: 445; Denhardt and Denhardt, 2011; Rosenbloom and McCurdy, 2006). In his re-envisioning of the traditional model, Rhodes proposes that we should not throw the baby out with the bathwater – TPA contained many skills required for 'good-governing'. These, he argues, are not antithetical but complimentary to many NPM and NPG reforms. These craft skills are learned on the job, and are not systematised (Rhodes, 2016) and include counselling, or in common public administration parlance, 'speaking truth to power'. There is stewardship, whereby bureaucrats possess expertise and institutional memory and, unlike NPM managers, are 'in it' for the long haul, exuding practical wisdom and prudence, where they carefully consider the implications of policy interventions and provide Ministers with advice accordingly, although this may often be seen by Ministers as a delaying tactic or an attempt to frustrate their policy objectives. There is probity, whereby civil servants should be honest and have the full confidence of their Minister. The Minister should know that when their tenure ends, the civil servant will not breach this confidence with the next Minister. Judgment exists since, not only is institutional memory important, but institutional norms develop over a period and form stories that are used to inform judgment and decisions. Diplomacy is the craft of being able to see the world from the 'other' perspective – the (dark) arts of negotiation and persuasion. Finally, there is the craft skill of political-nous – astuteness in assessing the political lay of the land (Rhodes, 2016: 643–644). Of course, many of these skills overlap and are not mutually exclusive, but the argument remains: these craft skills, associated with the traditional Westminster model of public administration, not NPM or NPG, are an essential element of the bureaucrat-politician relationship.

Public administration in Eurasia

Despite three rounds of NPM reform, Oleinik et al. (2015: 182), demonstrate that reforms in Kazakhstan have not taken hold. Similarly, Janenova and Knox (2017: 1) and (Knox, 2019) find that despite 'significant political endorsement at the highest level, administrative reforms in Kazakhstan have not had the intended effects'. In response, they suggest developing an outcomes-based model for administrative reform. Baimenov and Everest-Phillips (2016) give their practitioner perspective concurring that more needs to be done by reformists to take account for the institutional environment within which the reform is to take place. Summarising reform literature, Massey (2013) argues that reform initiatives tend not to prioritise

‘context’ as a key variable. Such a view draws on research by Perlman and Gleason (2007: 1327) and others submitting that ‘values rather than formal institutions under certain circumstances exert a determining influence in administrative development’. Building on Massey (2013), and Perlman and Gleason (2007), we argue: if administrative reform initiatives are to be successful, we need to understand the latent narratives guiding bureaucrat behaviour. Our research, therefore, investigates the bureaucratic conceptions of public administration upon which policy learning takes place.

In their comparative analysis between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, two countries with similar norms, values and experiences, Perlman and Gleason (2007: 1327) conclude that administrative reform is a function of policy choice rather than historical cultural experiences. They reject the ‘Asian values’ explanation for administrative reform in favour of a policy choice explanation. They suggest (2007: 1340) that ‘for administrative theory to develop a robust and yet clearly specifiable understanding of the role of culture in administrative process much more research is needed on the politics [of] formal public institutions in cross cultural contexts’. By focusing on core beliefs and values, our research responds to this call.

Oleinik et al. (2015) have demonstrated the links between the values and perceptions of administrative reform. O’Connor, Janenova and Knox (2019) have demonstrated that administrative reform initiatives in the region have not generated meaningful administrative reform. By using the lens of policy learning to focus on the bureaucrat beliefs that are being updated, we can begin to understand why.

Methodology

To provide corroboration for our proposition, we employed Q-Methodology and participant observation.

Q-Methodology

Based on the narratives outlined above, we developed a series of 48 statements, sixteen relating to each tradition. These are reproduced in the order they were presented to participants as shown in online supplementary Table 4. Q methodology is most concerned with determining a community members’ principled and causal beliefs. It is an inverted factor analysis that seeks to determine a set of existent viewpoints – it does not seek to determine the extent to which these viewpoints are ascribed (Kitzinger, 1987). Hence, akin to elite interviews, we draw on *low numbers of targeted respondents* in order to establish the extent to which Western models of Administrative reform have become embedded within the region. Brown (1980) suggests that ‘enough subjects to establish the existence of a Factor/Typology for purposes of comparing with another Factor/Typology’ is what is required. Generally, one participant for every two Q statements suffices, and due to the inversion, there are usually less interviewees than statements (Watts and Stenner, 2012). In other words, this P set is usually smaller than the Q set

(Brouwer, 1999). The aim is to have four or five persons defining each anticipated viewpoint, which are often two to four, and rarely more than six. (Brown, 1978) Van Exel and de Graaf (2005: 5/6) As in elite interviews, Q participants should be well informed and 'selected to represent the breadth of opinion in a target population, not the distribution of beliefs across the population' (Weber et al., 2009). See O'Connor (2014, 2017) for more developed argument on the use of Q Methodology in public administration research. To determine our interviewee population, a list of current members of the Regional Hub was drawn up. Those members who had attended at least two Regional Hub Committee meetings in the past two years (50% attendance) were identified and contacted – a list consisting of 24 people. This population was then contacted by e-mail and telephone. Of these, 15 were able to complete the online Q-sort, spending between 20 min and 1 h completing the Q-sort. Respondents were elite-level bureaucrats in their respective administrations, holding either the position of director or head of service with responsibility for administrative reform. They originated from: Armenia (1), Azerbaijan (4), Georgia (4), Kazakhstan (2), Kyrgyzstan (1), Mongolia (1) and Ukraine (2). Data collection took place between September and December 2016.

Participant observation

The team have attended and monitored three Regional Hub events between 2015 and 2017. These meetings took place in Russian with simultaneous translation provided for the research team. Informal, semi-structured interviews were held with most participants at each event. Interviewees were asked to speak about their understanding of the what the role of the public sector should be and their role within it. They were also asked about the obstacles to administrative reform in their own countries and to name examples of what they perceived to be best practice in other countries. Notes from the participant observation and related semi structured interviews assisted the interpretation the Q results.

Findings

Based on these theoretical conceptions of administrative reform, hub members identified three types of perceptions. Before identifying the defining characteristics of these three typologies, there are a number of conceptions that are shared by all hub members. These are identified in the section below. The numbers in brackets refer to the number of the statements supporting the claim in the text. The statements and corresponding numbers are presented in online supplementary Table 4 in the order they were presented to participants.

Common conceptions

All listed statements are non-significant at $P > .01$ and those with an * are also non-significant at $P > .05$. Respondents unanimously reject the idea that the civil service

is too privileged and interventionist (3*). In terms of a bureaucrat's attachment to the three theoretical positions outlined above, it is seen that bureaucrats tend to reject (to varying degrees) the neo-liberal idea that supporting businesses first will allow benefits to flow to citizens (24). There is also a tendency (again to varying degrees) to reject the idea of the regulatory state. Rather, the best way to ensure efficient public services is to facilitate and regulate the private sector in service provision (26*). They also slightly disagree that value for money is a primary consideration in the policy-making process (30*).

Role perception

In general, bureaucrats in the region view their primary role as that of a coordinator: coordinating various departments and agencies to ensure the implementation of policy (13*). They are also not afraid to take a leadership role in divisive policy issues (34). However, they do not see it as their role to coordinate actors outside the civil service, largely disagreeing with the statement: 'the key task of the bureaucrat is to manage the relationship between my department, the market and interest groups' (36*).

Interaction with the political level

They profoundly object to allocating resources according to political criteria (47*) but generally, do not see it as their responsibility to act as a counterweight to partisan arguments (40). Bureaucrats in the region demonstrate comprehensive agreement with the statement: 'My allegiance is to the state, not to a particular political ideology, party or leader' (14*). All typologies placed this statement in the most strongly agree category.

In summary, no dominant administrative reform agenda is evident, which may be interpreted to mean that the various cycles of reform have each left a legacy, the result being an amalgam of ideas and concepts on what the role and function of a bureaucrat actually is, or should be.

In the next section, the differences between three typologies are identified. Each of the typologies identified is loosely aligned with one of the dominant theoretical administrative reform schools. There is no correlation between gender and typology alignment, nor does the sample size allow for investigating a correlation between country and typology alignment.

Typology weightings

Table 1 reflects the narrative presented above: that respondents have many attributes in common. The left-hand column identifies the interviewee by number, while the top row identifies the typology number. The 'X' denotes that the bureaucrat's responses contributed to the makeup of that typology. The other two numbers in the row identify the extent to which each bureaucrat identifies with each of the

Table 1. Typology formulation.

QSORT	1	2	3
1 1	0.0642	0.0614	0.7950X
2 2	0.5271X	0.3295	0.2271
3 3	0.4465X	0.3265	0.2512
4 4	0.4097X	0.0293	0.1656
5 5	0.7800X	-0.2571	-0.0751
6 6	0.2809	-0.2343	0.5732X
7 7	0.6784X	-0.0654	0.3673
8 8	0.2049	0.3342	0.7145X
9 9	-0.1496	0.6270X	0.2580
10 10	0.4231	0.5596X	0.0198
12 12	0.6322X	0.3868	0.0628
13 13	0.6486X	0.1469	0.1606
14 14	-0.0657	0.8399X	-0.1962
15 15	0.5579X	0.5448	-0.0625

other typologies. All listed statements are significant at $P > .05$ and those with an * are also significant at $P > .01$.

Factor weights are merged with the raw data to generate each of the factors identified in online supplementary Table 4. The X denotes that the individual's responses contributed to the composition of that factor. Put differently, the respondent of course shares some attributes of each category, however the respondent has more in common with one group than the other groups. How that same individual relates to each of the other factors can also be understood by looking at the other figures in the row.

Table 2 identifies the similarity between the typologies.

Typology 1 (aligned with NPG)

Role perception

It is the only typology that interprets its role to prioritise 'ensuring policies are successfully designed and implemented' (35*). While these bureaucrats are politically impartial, they will defend the interests of their department (42*). They are the factor most likely to agree with the statement that 'a bureaucrat's work requires judgment based on practical wisdom because the rule book does not have all the answers' (44). They are the most likely typology to agree with the statement that 'experienced officials should know how to influence the governance process' (29).

Table 2. Differences between factors.

	1	2	3
1	1.0000	0.1979	0.3686
2	0.1979	1.0000	0.0824
3	0.3686	0.0824	1.0000

Relationship with civil society

Typology 1 does not see it as the role of the official to seek out NGO or CSO assistance in the design (21*) or implementation (2*) of policy.

Relationship with the political level

Bureaucrats weighing on type one do not automatically follow the directions of their political masters (43). Together with typology three, they most strongly agree that it is their primary role to offer frank and fearless advice to the political level (39).

Dominant administrative reform tradition

While they do concede that many motivations of the public and private sector are similar (41*) and that, in terms of management, the public sector can learn a lot from the private sector (1), they strongly disagree with the idea that members of the private sector should be recruited to the upper echelons of the civil service (25*). They most strongly disagree with the NPM assertion that bureaucrats and their departments should be measured quantitatively by their results (8*) and with Niskanen's (1971) idea that public sector bodies should compete for resources (6*).

Skills valued

The role of the official, according to type one bureaucrats, is to encourage cooperation between people and departments (22). They believe that collaborative leadership is the key to policy success (33*) and take an active role mediating conflicting interests (5). They are also the most rule-bound of our typologies, agreeing with the statement that it is their responsibility to follow the rules, no matter what the circumstances (4*). Technically, they are in favour of Central Regulatory Units to measure regulatory quality (27), but do not agree that these regulatory and contracting skills are the most important skills of a bureaucrat (23*).

Summary

In summary, this typology sees it as their role to bring about policy change; this being the role of the civil service rather than outside organisations. They have a

good working relationship with the political level and will offer frank advice when necessary. The public sector can learn a lot from the private sector in terms of management, but it should not try to emulate the private sector in all respects. This typology sees the merit in attaining regulatory skills, but these are seen as secondary to the more important skills of governance. They generally possess many of the skills associated with the NPG agenda. They agree with some of the craft statements and reject others. They generally reject the NPM skills.

Typology 2 (aligned with NPM)

Role perception and relationship with civil society

While rejecting the essential skills required of the Craft agenda, they do not reject all elements of NPG, seeing it as their role to seek out NGOs to assist them in the implementation (2*), and to a lesser extent development (21) of public policy. These bureaucrats do not see it as their role to be politically impartial and defend the interests of their departments (42*).

Relationship with the political level

Their relationship with the political level differs from other typologies – they do not see it as their role to offer free and frank advice to the political level (39*). Nor do they agree with the statement that they should influence the governance process (29*). However, they are the individuals most likely to hold onto their technical beliefs when faced with opposition from the political level (43).

Dominant administrative reform tradition

Bureaucrats weighing significantly on this typology argue for government that is smaller and more efficient (9*). They also strongly agree with the NPM assertion that bureaucrats and their departments should be measured quantitatively by their results (8*). They embrace the idea of business people being involved in the governance process (17*) and believe that many of the motivations of the public and private sectors are similar (41*).

Skills valued

They value regulatory and contracting skills (23*). These skills are prioritised over skills associated with craft. These bureaucrats disagree with the following statements: experienced officials should know how to influence the governance process; (29*) negotiation and persuasion skills are one of the most important skills of a bureaucrat (45*) and collaborative leadership across departments is crucial to ensure policy success (33*).

Table 3. Summary of the findings.

Type 1: NPG	Type 2: NPM	Type 3: Craft of public administration
<p>Key affiliation</p> <p>The public sector can learn a lot from the private sector in terms of management, but it should not try and emulate the private sector in all respects.</p>	<p>They are open to private sector ideas and personnel being incorporated into the public sector and are the most technocratic of our typologies.</p>	<p>Apart from public private partnerships, they completely reject the NPM agenda. While they do disagree with a few craft skills, they overwhelmingly support the majority of craft skills and to a lesser degree those skills associated with NPG.</p>
<p>Role perception</p> <p>They see their role to bring about policy change. This is the role of the civil service and not outside organisations.</p>	<p>They are unlikely to defend the interests of their departments</p> <p>They will hold their technical beliefs – but not try and influence the ‘political’ process through persuasion and negotiation. They are the bureaucrats most likely to focus on evidence based policy, to the detriment of cultural and societal factors.</p>	<p>This typology gives similar prominence to the technique of policy making. However, unlike typology two, who prioritise evidence-based policy making and the technocratic details of the process, this typology prioritises collaborative leadership and negotiation skills.</p>
<p>Relationship with civil society</p> <p>Do not see it as the role of the official to seek out NGO or CSO assistance in the design or implementation of policy.</p>	<p>This is the only typology to fully embrace working with NGOs and CSOs in both design and implementation of policy.</p>	<p>Would consult with NGOs regarding the implementation of policy, but would be less inclined to involve them in the policy formulation/design process.</p>
<p>Skills valued</p> <p>This typology sees the merit in attaining regulatory skills, but these are seen as secondary to the more important skills of governance. They possess many of the skills associated with the NPG agenda.</p>	<p>While rejecting the essential skills required of the Craft agenda, they do not reject all elements of NPG.</p> <p>This typology positively identifies with many of the NPM ideas. They also, to a lesser</p>	<p>They recognise the need to be politically impartial but will act in the best interests of their departments.</p> <p>They believe collaborative leadership to be crucial for ensuring policy success.</p>

(continued)

Table 3. Continued.

Type 1: NPG	Type 2: NPM	Type 3: Craft of public administration
They agree with some of the craft statements and reject others. They generally reject the NPM skills.	extent, identify with NPG reforms. They reject the Craft skills.	They embrace the craft skills of weighing the merits of competing stories. Negotiation and persuasion skills are also highly valued.
Relationship with the political level They have a good working relationship with the political level and will offer frank advice when necessary.	They will defend the interests of their departments but do not see it as their role to challenge the political level.	When a conflict of interest arises with the political level, they will not provide unquestioning political support. These bureaucrats do not see it as their role to build a relationship with the political level.

NPG: New Public Governance; NPM: New Public Management.

The results identify the range of perceptions civil servants possess on their relationship with civil society, the political level and the skills they value.

Summary

This typology is closest to NPM. This is the only typology to fully embrace working with NGOs and CSOs. They will defend the interests of their departments but do not see it as their role to challenge the political level. They are open to private sector ideas and personnel being incorporated into the public sector and are the most technocratic of our typologies. They will hold on to their technical beliefs – but will not try and influence the ‘political’ process through persuasion and negotiation. They are the bureaucrats most likely to focus on evidence based policy, to the detriment of cultural and societal factors. This typology positively identifies with many of the NPM ideas. They also, to a lesser extent, identify with NPG reforms. They reject the Craft skills.

Typology 3 – (aligned with the craft of public administration)

Role perception

This typology attributes a lot of importance to the technical aspects of their role (28*). However, technicality does not mean skills such as the understanding the details of regulatory reform (23). Rather, technicality is interpreted as being closer to the generalist civil servant. They interpret their role as to offer Ministers frank and fearless advice (39). Similar to other typologies, they are not concerned with how their decisions will look on the front page of a newspaper (38*) – however, they do not disagree with this statement to the same extent as the other typologies. They do not see it as their role to mediate conflicting interests (5) but strongly agree that collaborative leadership across departments is crucial to ensure policy success (33*, 22, 13). They see it as their role to develop clear roles for team members (32).

Relationship with civil society

While this typology would consult with NGOs regarding the implementation of policy, they would be less inclined to involve them in the policy formulation/design process (2,21).

Their relationship with the political level

When a conflict of interest arises with the political level, they will not provide unquestioning political support (43*). These bureaucrats do not see it as their role to build a relationship with the political level (12*).

Dominant administrative reform tradition

It is the only typology that agrees that the motivations of the public and private sectors are different (41*). They tend to agree that bureaucrats and departments should be measured quantitatively by results (8*) and that public–private partnerships are good (45). Interestingly, they also believe the private sector to be more

efficient than the public sector (16). However, they disagree with many of the NPM ideals. This suggests that this type, while they believe in the public delivery of services, is frustrated by the inefficiencies they regularly encounter within their departments. This typology disagrees with the following NPM sentiments:

- In terms of management, the public sector can learn a lot from the private sector (1*);
- Key Performance Indicators are good way of measuring success (19*);
- Public sector bodies should compete with each other for funding (6*);
- In this era of administrative reform, regulatory and contracting skills are one of the most important skills of the bureaucrat (23*).

They are the only typology to strongly disagree with the statement: 'The solution to many policy problems begins with developing partnerships, encouraging modernisation and joined up government' (11*).

Skills valued

Adherents of typology three recognise the need to be politically impartial but will act in the best interests of their departments (42*). They believe collaborative leadership to be crucial for ensuring policy success (33*). They embrace the craft skills of weighing the merits of competing stories. (46*). Negotiation and persuasion skills are also highly valued (45).

Summary

This typology gives prominence to the technique of policy making. However, unlike typology 2, which prioritises evidence-based policy making and the technocratic details of the process, this typology prioritises the techniques of collaborative leadership and negotiation. They are also open to the idea of working with NGOs and CSOs – but in a different way than type one. Apart from public private partnerships, they completely reject the NPM agenda. While they do disagree with a few craft skills, they overwhelmingly support the majority of craft skills and to a lesser degree those skills associated with NPG.

Summary of the findings

Discussion

Key finding one: Rebalancing the focus: Public policy and public administration. Epistemic community literature informs us that, to have influence, the community must have a shared technocratic and expert focus (Table 3). However, our study has found that, while Eurasian Regional Hub members are very attached to the ideas of administrative reform, how they perceive administrative reform differs greatly,

implying that that no dominant narrative exists among public administration reform practitioners in the region. Unlike in Europe, where epistemic communities have emerged from committees of bureaucrats, our evidence demonstrates no such commonality of core beliefs in Eurasia. Davis-Cross (2013: 148), as part of her review of the epistemic community literature, recommends that scholarly research needs to focus on the internal cohesion of epistemic communities. Our case study demonstrates that, on a superficial level, committee members share policy core (perhaps even deep core) beliefs about the need for administrative reform, indeed many of them share some ‘common governance beliefs’ (see section ‘Common conceptions’), however how these beliefs are manifest differs.

In seeking to identify how administrative reform is interpreted by leading civil servants in Eurasia, the study has demonstrated that senior bureaucrats within the region possess three different perceptions of administrative reform. These perceptions differ remarkably. There is no correlation between any primary factor such as nationality or gender and typology alignment, suggesting that there is no dominant state or regional narrative on administrative reform. Secondly, these conceptions of administrative reform are based on the three dominant Western traditions of administrative reform though they do not neatly align with any one of these traditions. Rather, the absence of a dominant narrative of administrative reform has allowed respondents to draw on their own interpretations of administrative reform. There is, moreover, no shared sense of purpose, no ‘community of practice’ or ‘epistemic community’. While knowledge on policy content is exchanged at regular meetings of regional bureaucrats, there exists no shared understanding of the fundamentals of an administrative reform agenda. The focus of many regional interventions has been policy and process-specific: knowledge exchange on best anti-corruption practice, performance related pay, oversight agencies etc. The research presented here suggests that knowledge exchange should also focus on the *role* of the public service in Eurasia, and correspondingly, the role of the bureaucrat within it (in a normative sense). Thus, some rebalancing needs to take place between international and regional public policy interventions and public administration interventions. While public policy interventions are of course required, the administrative foundations upon which they are built (or learned), require greater practitioner attention and an awareness – and recognition – of the centrality of people (i.e. the bureaucrats themselves, their role, their values and motivations or ethos) in the policy process.

While recent reviews of the learning literature have focused on learning modes, this research has focused on the underlying assumptions upon which the bureaucrat learns: what is being updated so to speak. As the administrative tradition influences receptiveness to reform (Huxley et al., 2016), international organisations interested in developing a policy transfer/learning/translation platform need, therefore, to begin by developing a shared understanding of the meaning of public administration reform, before seeking policy change through policy learning; for what may be learned may not be what the teacher had intended.

While it remains to be seen if a shift in core governance beliefs occurs within this emerging transnational network, the evidence presented here demonstrates that Western doctrines of administrative reform have influenced bureaucratic role conceptions. The various cycles of reform have, over the last 30 years, become embedded in the local bureaucracy and indeed have left a legacy – of sorts; pointing to the effectiveness of international policy experts in transmitting the latest ideas across the region. Nonetheless, in place of a consensus, the result is now that an amalgam of ideas and concepts on the fundamental basics of administrative reform exists within the region.

Key finding two: The craft skills of public administration

The organization and functioning of public administration have proven to be one of the major politically and socially divisive issues across multi-ethnic societies (O'Connor and Vaesen, 2018: 835). To improve our understanding of bureaucrat role conceptions, Rhodes (2016:645) has advocated for a more systematic account of the craft skills of the bureaucrat, drawing on current bureaucrat experiences. Our research speaks to this call: instead of simply measuring the extent to which the Craft Skills of public administration exist within the bureaucratic population, our methodological design has allowed us to identify the prominence of these skills in relation to the competing skills identified by NPM and NPG doctrines. The results lend support to Rhodes' (2016: 644) thesis that it is not a case of NPM nor NPG versus the traditional model but acknowledging that the traditional skills 'remain essential and need protecting'. While these skills are prevalent in one of our typologies, elements appear in the other two typologies. In our bid to establish a common conception of 'what works' in public policy, we must not forget about the foundations upon which policies are implemented.

Concluding remarks

The article has presented evidence supporting Rhodes' (2016) recent research that some of the key 'craft skills' of the traditional bureaucrat, exist and are valued, in part, in Eurasia. Further, the research has outlined the success of an international network in bringing together bureaucrats from many Eurasian countries, where many other attempts at regional cooperation have failed. Such success demonstrates the value of the epistemic community approach in developing international cooperation. While these networks *look* like epistemic communities, their role conceptions differ considerably – there is no common conception of administrative reform. Our research, therefore, demonstrates a need for practitioners to rebalance their emphasis and focus on the key skills of public administration (potentially reinforcing an ethos of public service), rather than solely on the content of particular public policies or programmes.

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