Bureaucratic Structure and Administrative Behaviour

Lessons from international bureaucracies

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Abstract

This article contributes to a growing international bureaucracy literature by exploring the relationship between bureaucratic structure and administrative behaviour. The ambition of this study is twofold: First, it explores the extent to which international bureaucracies combine two inherent behavioural logics: a logic of hierarchy and a logic of portfolio. Secondly, two key empirical lessons are used to modify four conventional claims in existing research. Drawing on a rich body of data from three international bureaucracies (the Commission, the OECD Secretariat, and the WTO Secretariat), this study suggests that administrative behaviour among international civil servants is profoundly shaped by the *bureaucratic structures* of international bureaucracies. Variation in the abovementioned behavioural logics is conditioned by two aspects of bureaucratic structure: First, the accumulation of relevant <u>organisational capacities</u> at the executive centre of international bureaucracies, and secondly, the vertical and horizontal <u>specialisation</u> of international bureaucracies.

Key words: International bureaucracy, bureaucratic structure, administrative behaviour, the EU Commission, the OECD Secretariat, the WTO Secretariat

Introduction[1]

Studies suggest that international bureaucracies change world politics (Biermann and Siebenhüner 2009), affect power distributions across levels of government (Egeberg and Trondal 2009), and transform domestic democratic governance (Keohane et al. 2009). There is a mounting body of comparative studies of the *internal dynamics* of international bureaucracies (e.g. Barnett and Finnemore 1999; Checkel 2007; Gehring 2003: 4; Gould and Kelman 1970; Johnston 2005; Mouritzen 1990; Reinalda and Verbeek 2004; Rochester 1986). Nevertheless, existing research is inconclusive as regards the extent to which and how the bureaucratic structure of international bureaucracies shape basic behavioural logics of the staff. One reason for this may be that a gulf persists between social science sub-disciplines, such as public administration and organisation theory (March 2009), as well as comparative public administration scholarship and international organisation (IO) literature (Heady 1998: 33; Jörgens et al. 2009; Trondal et al. 2010). This article contributes to a growing international bureaucracy literature by assessing the relationship between bureaucratic structure and administrative behaviour. The study addresses two research questions in this regard:

- First, to what extent does international civil servants abide to a logic of hierarchy within international bureaucracies, thus challenging an inherent logic of portfolio?
- Secondly, is a logic of hierarchy *profoundly penetrating* international bureaucracies or is it merely occurring at the executive centre of international bureaucracies - within presidential offices and general secretariats?

This study compares two enduring behavioural patterns *within* bureaucratic organisations: a logic of hierarchy and a logic of portfolio. First, a <u>behavioural logic of hierarchy</u> suggests that international civil servants upgrade common agendas, co-ordinate actions of sub-units, abide to steering signals from 'above', downplay inter-service conflicts and turf-wars, reduce sub-unit allegiances, and emphasise the concerns and considerations of the executive centre. By contrast, a <u>behavioural logic of portfolio</u> safeguards informed decisions and due administrative practices, emphasises divergent agendas, co-ordinate actions inside sub-units rather than across them, emphasise signals,

concerns and considerations of sub-units, and pay loyalty primarily towards sub-units. These behavioural logics *highlight competing understandings of bureaucratic organisation, administrative behaviour, and bureaucratic change* (Aberbach et al. 1981; Wilson 1989). Balancing these logics confronts one classical dilemma in bureaucratic organisations between instrumental design and executive centre formation on the one hand and bureaucratic differentiation and sub-unit autonomy on the other (Verhoest et al. 2010). Governance within international bureaucracies is ultimately influenced by how trade-offs between these behavioural logics are balanced by individual officials (Wilson 1989: 327). These behavioural logics are studied among officials in three selected international bureaucracies; the European Commission (Commission) administration, the WTO Secretariat, and the OECD Secretariat (N=121) (see below). The unit of analysis is individual civil servants – that is the actors that ultimately make international bureaucracies act. Building on a most different systems design the study compares two behavioural logics within three seemingly different IOs (see below).

The ambition of this study is twofold. First, it explores the extent to which international bureaucracies combine the abovementioned behavioural logics. Secondly, the empirical lessons drawn suggest that four conventional wisdoms or claims in existing research should be modified.

A first conventional claim in current literature is that the administrative behaviour of staff within international bureaucracies is profoundly shaped by the legal mandates of IOs, codified in founding treaties (e.g. Curtin 2009; Verhey et al. 2009). Concomitantly, the modus operandi of international bureaucracies is associated with and causally explained by their legal status. The legal status of international bureaucracies thus represents binding instructions and mandates (Yataganas 2001). For example, international bureaucracies with a wide range of legal responsibilities are able to act more independently of member-states than international bureaucracies with few delegated provisions (e.g. Rittberger and Zangl 2006: 11). The data presented in this study, however, suggests that *legal mandates* have little explanatory potential with respect to administrative behaviour among international civil servants. Despite massive differences in the range of legal responsibilities delegated to the three international bureaucracies studied, they act on the basis of fairly similar behavioural logics. Whereas the Commission has been delegated large proportions of exclusive legal competences in a wide area of policies, the OECD and WTO secretariats have been delegated fairly few provisions in few policy sectors. The behavioural logics observed in this study are thus not associated with variation in the legal competences and the ranges of responsibilities delegated to these international bureaucracies.

A second claim in current literature suggests that the organisational capacities of IOs may explain the administrative behaviour of bureaucratic staff (Trondal et al. 2010). For example, small international bureaucracies are assumed less able to act independently of the member-states than large international bureaucracies having a large administrative staff at their disposal (Biermann and SiebenHüner 2009). Contrary to this claim, however, our data illuminates that the size of international bureaucracies is not a key explanation of variation in the behavioural logics of international civil servants. Despite the Commission being 12 times larger than the WTO Secretariat with respect to the number of A-grade staff (Trondal et al. 2010), a portfolio logic is observed to the same extent in the WTO Secretariat as in the Commission administration.

A third conventional claim is that the administrative behaviour of staff of international bureaucracies is profoundly shaped by the IOs in which they are embedded (Barnett and Finnemore 2004). For example, international bureaucracies that are embedded in intergovernmental IOs are assumed less likely to act independently of their member-state than international bureaucracies within supranational IOs – such as the Commission. This claim largely reflects a rationalist approach in IO studies. According to this approach, a clear distinction is not drawn between the IO and their bureaucratic institutions. Focus is often drawn towards the mere visible interplay of states within IO plenary assemblies rather than the back-stage activities of the secretariats (Rochester 1986). Attention has been overly directed at studying why states delegate power to IOs (e.g. Pollack 2003), the voting behaviour of states in general assemblies, the role of great leaders of international bureaucracies (Chesterman 2007; Cox 1969: 202; Rochester 1986), and reform and change of IOs in an overly intergovernmental order (Bauer and Knill 2007; Mathiason 2007; Yi-Chong and Weller 2008: 35). The data presented here, however, merely suggests that international bureaucracies seem to act *fairly independently* of the IO in which these bureaucracies are embedded. Three international bureaucracies embedded in three different IOs are shown to be equally driven by a portfolio logic. Larger variation in administrative behaviour is observed *within* than *between* international bureaucracies. The surprise is not that we observe a portfolio logic in international bureaucracies, but *the extent* to which the same behavioural logic is observed to the same extent within three bureaucracies embedded within three seemingly different IOs.

A final claim, highlighted here, is that bureaucratic staff are profoundly re-socialised by their international bureaucracy (Beyers 2010; Checkel 2007). Recent research have made a 'constructivist turn' and rediscovered processes of actor socialisation, complex learning and cognitive framing of norms and

rules (Beyers 2010; Checkel 2007; Trondal 2007). International bureaucracies are pictured as more than empty vessels and neutral arenas in which state representatives gather (Finnemore 1996: 35). The potential for socialisation to occur within international bureaucracies is assumed to be positively related to the *duration* and the *intensity* of interaction amongst the organisational members - the software of bureaucratic life (Herrmann et al. 2004: 14). Intensive in-group contact and interaction is assumed conducive to the emergence of relative stabile networks that shape the behavioural logics of international civil servants. The data presented in this study, however, suggests that administrative behaviour among international civil servants is profoundly conditioned by the *bureaucratic structures* of international bureaucracies and not due to socialisation processes. Variation in the two behavioural logics introduced above is conditioned by two aspects of bureaucratic structure:

- First, the accumulation of relevant <u>organisational capacities</u> at the executive centre of international bureaucracies
- Secondly, the vertical and horizontal <u>specialisation</u> of international bureaucracies

This article proceeds as follows; the first section suggests an organisational theory approach to account for variation in administrative behaviour. The second section presents a rich body of data on two behavioural logics among international civil servants in three international bureaucracies.

An organisational theory approach

Formal organisations offer codified and normative structures for incumbents. In order to understand the process whereby actors adopt particular behaviour and roles, one has to unpack the normative structures embedded in these organisational principles and the logic of action underneath. The mechanism supporting an organisational approach is the bounded rationality and computational limitations of actors (March 2008). Formal organisations provide cognitive and normative shortcuts and categories that simplify and guide actors' choice of behaviour and roles (Simon 1957).[2] Organisations provide frames for storing experiences, cognitive maps categorising complex information, procedures for reducing transaction costs, regulative norms that add cues for appropriate behaviour, and physical boundaries and temporal rhythms that guide actors' perceptions of relevance with respect to administrative behaviour (Barnett and Finnemore 1999; March 2010; March

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[2] By contrast, informal structures contain non-codified normative structures.

and Olsen 1998). Organisations also discriminate between what conflicts that should be attended to and what conflicts that should be de-emphasised (Egeberg 2006). By organising civil servants into permanent bureaucracies within IOs, a system of 'rule followers and role players…' is established relatively independently of the domestic branch of executive government (March and Olsen 1998: 952). From an organisational theory approach, three hypotheses are derived on the relationship between bureaucratic structure and administrative behaviour.

H1 *Behavioural logics are likely to vary systematically according to the <u>vertical</u> specialisation of international bureaucracies. In particular, <u>administrative capacity building</u> within executive centres is positively associated with a logic of hierarchy.*

H2 *Behavioural logics are likely to vary systematically according to the <u>horizontal</u> specialisation (by purpose and process) of international bureaucracies. In particular, whereas the principle of process may encourage a logic of hierarchy, the principle of purpose is conducive to a logic of portfolio.*

H1 and H2 suggest that the behavioural logics of international civil servants are profoundly mediated by the organisational structure of international bureaucracies. Firstly, one proxy of the <u>vertical specialisation</u> of bureaucratic organisations is the formal rank of personnel. Officials within different formal ranks are likely to employ different behaviour and role perceptions. Arguably, officials in top rank positions are more likely to evoke a logic of hierarchy than officials in bottom rank positions. The latter group is more likely to enact a logic of portfolio (Mayntz 1999: 84).

The Commission administration, the OECD Secretariat and the WTO Secretariat are all vertically specialised bureaucratic organisations. Vertically specialised bureaucratic organisations have the potential for *disciplining and controlling* civil servants by administrative command and individual incentive systems like salary, promotion, and rotation (Egeberg 2003). Vertically specialised international bureaucracies are likely to have a stronger impact on incumbents' behavioural and role perceptions than less vertically-specialised international bureaucracies (Bennett and Oliver 2002: 425; Egeberg 2003: 137; Knight 1970). However, the relative <u>administrative capacity</u> existing within executive centres may account for variation in the extent to which civil servants are guided by a logic of hierarchy. As shown below, the administrative capacity at the helm of the Commission is significantly larger than within the OECD Secretariat and particularly the WTO Secretariat. There are a few key mechanisms through which the Commission may co-ordinate the services by hierarchy: Most notable is through the principle of collegiality by the College of Commissioners as well as the co-ordinating role of the

General Secretariat (GS). These co-ordinating mechanisms may be supplemented by the weekly meetings of Dirctor-Generals, chefs de cabinets, and deputy chefs de cabinets (Christiansen 2008: 75-6). In addition, the Commission has introduced new management techniques, including a more linear career structure, promotion linked to merit, and obligatory mobility among the staff. A second key element in recent management reforms in the Commission has been the creation of a new appraisal system – the Career Development Reviews (CDR) (see Trondal et al. 2010). In sum, the Commission has accumulated administrative capacity to impose a logic of hierarchy on the staff to a far larger extent than other international bureaucracies (Bennett and Oliver 2002: 425; Egeberg 2003: 137; Knight 1970). In effect, the vertical hierarchy of the Commission administration is expected to make officials more sensitive to a steer from above (the logic of hierarchy), than among officials in the OECD and WTO Secretariats.

Secondly, as regards the <u>horizontal specialisation</u> of bureaucratic organisations, department and unit structures are typically specialised according to two conventional principles: purpose and process (Gulick 1937). Robert W. Cox and Harold K. Jacobson (1973) saw the organisational similarities between the domestic branch of executive government and international bureaucracies. Similarly, Wagenen has argued that (1971: 5 – original emphasis), '[t]he *similarities* overwhelm the differences between national and international administration'. Most executive institutions are horizontally organised according to the principles of purpose and process (Gulick 1937). Formal organisations may be specialised by the major *purpose* served – such as research, health, food safety, etc. This principle of organisation tends to activate patterns of co-operation and conflict among incumbents along sectoral (portfolio) cleavages (Egeberg 2006). Arguably, organisation by major purpose served is likely to bias behavioural logics towards a portfolio logic. This mode of horizontal specialisation results in less than adequate horizontal co-ordination *across* organisational units and better co-ordination *within* organisational units (Ansell 2004: 237; Page 1997: 10). The Commission DG and unit structure is a prominent example of this horizontal principle of specialisation (Egeberg and Trondal 1999). The Commission is a horizontally pillarised system of government specialised by purpose where DGs enjoy relative autonomy vis-à-vis other sub-units and the executive helm (Trondal 2008). Similar horizontal specialisation is prevalent in the OECD and WTO Secretariats (Trondal et al. 2010). Because officials spend most of their time and energy in organisational sub-units, they are expected to make affective ties primarily towards their sub-unit and less towards the organisation as a whole (Ashford and Johnson 2001: 36). Subsequently, international bureaucrats embedded in trade departments (ex. DG Trade of the Commission) are most likely to activate a portfolio logic.

A second principle of horizontal specialisation present within most bureaucratic organisations is the principle of the major *process* utilised – such as translation, general secretariat, administration, legal services, personnel services, etc. (Gulick 1937). This horizontal principle encourages the horizontal integration of functional departments and the disintegration of the major purposes served. General secretariats (GS) typically have horizontal tasks of co-ordinating bureaucratic sub-units and vertically integrating the executive centre and subordinated units. These organisational functions are likely to foster horizontally oriented behavioural perceptions among incumbents because their portfolios cover larger terrains of the bureaucracy. Subsequently, organisation by major process is conducive to a logic of hierarchy vis-à-vis 'subordinated' departments (ex. DG Trade in the Commission). Hence, within the Commission the GS illustrate the process principle. The GS aims at integrating the policy DGs into one coherent political secretariat for the College. Equivalent units as the GS exist in the OECD and WTO Secretariats, however, with much less organisational capacities available. Officials in general secretariats are expected to develop inter-unit preferences, roles and loyalties by activating a 'helicopter view' of the international bureaucracy.

H3 *Organisational compatibility across bureaucratic sub-units is positively associated with a logic of hierarchy.*

Whereas organisational duplication is often conceived of as costly and redundant (e.g. European Commission 1999: 52), it may also be conceived of as an organisational device against decisional errors within organisational sub-units (Landau 1969). It is argued here that organisational compatibility may strengthen the capacity for executive centres to penetrate bureaucratic sub-units. Reflecting the vertical specialisation of bureaucratic organisations, studies demonstrate that agency officials exercise their discretion relatively insulated from ongoing political processes at the cabinet level (Egeberg 2003; Greer 1994; Wood and Waterman 1991). Agency officials tend to have relatively little contact with the political leadership of their respective ministries, with other ministerial departments than their parent department, and with parliament. Most typically they tend to give priority to professional considerations rather than political concerns, and they also usually assign more weight to user and clientele concerns than to signals from executive politicians. In ministerial departments, on the other hand, top priority is given to signals from the minister but also to professional concerns. This loss of political control over organisational sub-units subordinated to the ministry can be partly compensated for by strengthening relevant organizational units in the respective ministerial departments (organizational compatibility) (Egeberg and Trondal 2009). Similarly, within international bureaucracies,

organisational compatibility, if established, between the executive centre (ex. the Commission GS) and bureaucratic sub-units (ex. DG Trade in the Commission) would augment the potential for a logic of hierarchy to be evoked among the staff, by giving the executive centre privileged access to and influence over bureaucratic sub-units.

Data and methodology

International bureaucracies consist of the permanent secretariats of IOs. They are organisationally separate from the plenary assemblies (councils of ministers) of IOs and have a formal autonomy vis-à-vis the member states. The autonomy is often codified in staff regulations. International bureaucracies typically have fixed locations, they have a formalised division of labour vis-à-vis the plenary assembly, they have regular meetings, and they are staffed mostly with permanent personnel recruited on the principle of merit, although sometimes supplemented with a more flexible set of contracted temporary staff (seconded officials). One essential element of international bureaucracies is that the staff has sworn an oath of undivided and primary *loyalty* towards the international bureaucracy. With respect to the formal organisation of international bureaucracies, they are vertically specialised bureaucracies, often with an administrative leader at the top. The Commission differs from the OECD and WTO Secretariats by having its political leadership organised outside the Council of Ministers and thus formally independent of member-state preferences and the inherited intergovernmental order. The Commission is the hub in a multilevel union administration that spans levels of governance, and has gained administrative capacities to support its formal independence vis-à-vis the Council (of the European Union) and the European Parliament, for example with respect to the initiative and implementation of legal acts (Curtin and Egeberg 2008).

The empirical observations benefit from synchronised comparative studies of permanent and temporary officials in the Commission, the WTO Secretariat, and the OECD Secretariat. The study is synchronised in the sense that the same interview guide has been applied to all three bureaucracies and with respect to the selection of administrative sub-units within each bureaucracy. The interviews were semi-directed, using a standardised interview guide that was applied flexibly during interviews. The questions posed in the interviews were directed at measuring the logics of hierarchy and portfolio among the civil servants. Proxies applied were: contact patterns, co-ordination behaviour, and conflict structures, and their role and identity perceptions. Key questions were the following: "With whom do you regularly interact at work?" "Does your nationality or the nationality of your colleagues "matter" with respect to

your daily work?" "Has an *esprit de corps* developed within your unit/division?" "To what extent do you identify with or feel a personal attachment towards the following institutions?" "What kind of roles do you regularly emphasise at work?"

In order to maximise variation on the independent variables listed above interviewees were selected accordingly. First, two administrative sub-units were selected to measure the effect of horizontal specialisation of the Commission. Trade units were selected as bureaucratic structures specialised horizontally by *purpose*. Similarly, General Secretariats were chosen as a bureaucratic structure horizontally specialised according to the principle of *process*. These bureaucratic units, however, also offer variation as regards vertical specialisation, where the GS represents the bureaucratic centres of international bureaucracies and trade units represent one among several policy portfolios of international bureaucracies. Moreover, to further measure the effect of hierarchy, interviewees were carefully selected from different levels of rank. However, by concentrating on officials at the 'A' level we hoped to reach people who are relatively more involved in policy-making activities. Finally, trade units and General Secretariats are also used to gauge the impact of organisational compatibility across bureaucratic sub-units. One caveat is warranted: The article merely uses the selected cases as illustrative devices to illuminate tensions between two behavioural logics within international bureaucracies, not firmly test them. More rigorous tests would warrant data not yet available.

Table 1 List of interviewees among permanent officials, by formal rank

	Top managers (director-generals, deputy director-generals, or equivalent)	**Middle managers** (directors, heads of unit, deputies, or equivalent)	**Desk officials** (advisors, counsellors, case handlers, analysts, officers, or equivalent)	**Total**
The Commission	1	9	14	24
The OECD Secretariat	0	10	18	28
The WTO Secretariat	2	4	13	19
Total	3	23	45	71

The interviews were carried out during 2006 and 2007 in Brussels, Geneva and Paris. All interviews were taped and fully transcribed. All interviewees are treated with full anonymity. Consequently, quotations from interviews are referred to as follows (Commission 2, WTO 15, etc.).

In addition to interviews with permanent officials, interviews with temporary officials are also included. Having ambiguous affiliation to the organisation, temporary officials represent a crucial case on the effects of bureaucratic structure on administrative behaviour. This study benefits from three separate but highly co-ordinated studies of Commission secondees. The first study consists mainly of Swedish, Danish and Norwegian secondees (Trondal 2006). Based on similar methodology, this first study was replicated twice on secondees from the Netherlands (Trondal et al. 2008). This replication applied the same interview guide as in the original study on Nordic secondees. In summary, these data include three in-depth qualitative interview studies (N=50) on secondees. Despite covering only a minor selection of Commission secondees, the organisational approach outlined above does not predict significant variation in behavioural logics between secondees of different national origins (see Trondal et al. 2008). Table 2 offers the total overview of interviews.

Table 2 Number of interviewees, by administrative unit

	Trade units	General Secretariats	Other units	Total
The Commission - permanent officials - temporary officials	18 0	6 0	0 50	24 50
The OECD Secretariat	16	12	0	28
The WTO Secretariat	19	0	0	19
Total	53	18	50	121

Balancing hierarchy and portfolio

The following section is organised in two separate sections: Section I explores the logic of hierarchy and section II assesses the logic of portfolio. Within each section, the Commission, the OECD Secretariat, and the WTO secretariat are analysed separately.

SECTION I: The logic of hierarchy

The Commission

A logic of hierarchy has been observed within the Commission at several points throughout its history – notably during the Presidencies of Jean Monnet and Jaques Delors. "At the end of Delors' ten-year tenure at the helm of the commission its potential for political leadership … had been demonstrated conclusively" (Christiansen 2008: 63). Essentially, however, the power-base of these presidents and their policy initiatives taken were not safeguarded through executive capacity building within the Commission. A relative downgrading of bureaucratic organisation was also observed throughout the Monnet Presidency decades earlier. Jean Monnet had the vision of great leadership from the top of the EU executive, with assistance of a small and flexible expert administration consisting of seconded national officials (Duchêne 1994). Jean Monnet did not envision a permanent bureaucracy as inherent in Western democracies. By contrast, it was Walter Hallstein (Commission president 1958-67), who designed the Commission into a bureaucratic organisation (Loth and Bitsch 2007: 58). Most of the powers were left to the policy DGs and fairly little to the command centre of the College and the GS. This section substantiates that the Commission administration has recently experienced substantial capacity building around the President and the GS, accompanying a strengthened logic of hierarchy among GS officials.

One recent organisational change in the Commission administration has strengthened the potential for a logic of hierarchy: a presidentialisation of the Commission. At present, one of the most salient issues in the Commission is the ambition to *presidentialise* the Commission – making the GS into the administrative command centre for the President. Presidentialisation of the Commission has two ingredients to it: First, increased steering and co-ordination *ambitions, and* secondly, a concentration of *power resources* around the President.

With reference to the former, *ambitions* to presidentialise the Commission is documented by all our interviewees in the GS and by President Barroso himself (2009: 37). As regard executive capacity building, the power base of previous Commission Presidents such as Monnet and Delors was largely based on their *personal* capacities, convictions, successes, and a dedicated inner circle of director-generals, cabinet members, and Commissioners (Dûchene 1994; Ross 1995). Similarly, the GS has been considered the power-house of the Commission throughout the Commission history, largely due to the *man* who held the post as Secretary-General from 1958 to 1987, Emile Noël (see Kassim 2006). By contrast, the increased presidentialisation of the Barosso I Commission is perhaps primarily associated with <u>organisational capacity</u>

building inside the Commission, aiming at making the GS to a steering and co-ordinating centre of the Commission services. The GS at present has 480 officials (Statistical Bulletin 2010). One recent organisational remedy that has been launched is to install organisational compatibility between the GS and the policy DGs (interviews). While the Commission previously considered organisational compatibility as costly and redundant (European Commission 1999), it is increasingly conceived as a solution to portfolio autonomy (interviews). Organisational compatibility across the GS and policy DGs seem to ease mutual communication and understanding between the GS and the respective policy DGs. In an effort to get policy DGs to comply with certain parts of the Kinnock reform package (Strategic Planning and Programming), specialised units ("cells") are installed within the policy DGs that deal specifically with the reform contents offered by the GS (Barzelay and Jacobsen 2009: 326). In effect, organisational compatibility between the GS and policy DGs ensure that the logic of hierarchy more easily penetrate policy DGs. As a consequence, President Barosso reports being 'determined to provide "political guidance" to the institution. He is more directly involved and takes responsibility for a large number of dossiers' (Kurpas et al. 2008: 32). Concomitantly, comparing the number of proposals prepared under the direct responsibility of Presidents Prodi and Barosso, Kurpas et al. (2008: 33) report that President Barosso has been overwhelmingly more active. Essential to our argument, this activism is associated with administrative capacity building at the centre of the Commission administration. Administrative capacity building of these kinds enhances the potential for a logic of hierarchy to be activated among staff.

The presidentialisation of the Commission administration, however, only supplements the horizontal specialisation and 'siloisation' of the services. As seen above, the 'siloisation' of the services is increasingly echoed in the College where Commissioners have become less collegial and more portfolio oriented over time (Joana and Smith 2004; Kurpas et al. 2008). The non-portfolio logic observed in previous studies seems increasingly weakened in the College (Joana and Smith 2004). This is reflected in College meetings, in the relationship between the Commissioners and their DGs, and the development of direct links between Commissioners and 'their' Community agencies (Groenleer 2009: 130). One implication is an increased presidential role in the direct co-ordination of Commission portfolios (interviews).

The co-ordinating role of the GS is described by several respondents as increasingly presidential. The vast majority of our GS interviewees report that the GS is an emergent executive power base of the President. The increased presidentialisation of the GS seems to be partly caused by the increased administrative capacities of the GS, partly by the personal ambitions of

President Barosso, and partly associated with the <u>horizontal specialisation</u> of the GS.

> The Secretariat General remains the guarantor of collegiality, at the service of the President. I consider that the biggest challenge for the GS today is that of policy integration, bringing together different policy strands at the earliest possible stage of preparation to ensure that when proposals arrive at the College for decision they are coherent with the overall policy goals.
>
> (O'Sullivan 2006: 101)

The OECD Secretariat

The GS of the OECD Secretariat currently counts 43 A-level officials. Due to relatively weak administrative <u>capacities</u> at the executive centre of the OECD Secretariat, a logic of hierarchy is largely absent among OECD Secretariat staff. The organisation of the Secretariat into directorates, teams and individual dossiers is reflected in the perceptions reported by most interviewees. The OECD Secretariat, however, combines horizontal specialisation into separate 'silos' with organisational structures that safeguard co-ordination and co-operation across directorates. In order to safeguard inter-service co-operation, the OECD Secretariat is largely organised into horizontal teams that build bridges across directorates. However, the main organisational principle inside the OECD Secretariat is that of individual dossiers (purpose). The horizontal portfolio <u>specialisation</u> is reflected in the following quotes:

> You have teams, but people also tend to work alone. I'm always amazed at people burning the midnight oil here at the OECD, and they work hard. The main reason for this is that tasks tend to be apportioned to individual people. And you do not necessarily have a team to take up the baton if you are sick or on holiday. You have to get your work done. There are people, I think, who eventually feel quite depressed because of the loneliness of tasks, because of the isolation and the fact that each one is on a hard task.
>
> (OECD 13)

'I personally do not interact with people outside the division. The trade export credit division is quite autonomous. There is no co-ordination with the other divisions.' (OECD 15). The horizontal portfolio organisation also accompanies contact patterns that go across directorates and teams with compatible dossiers:

> Despite horizontal specialisation into separate directorates, there is a lot of contact and partnership between the directorates. All directorates are a bit dependent upon each other. Any directorate that feels independent very soon learns that it isn't, because it needs resources, needs communication. In the end, everything comes back together.
>
> (OECD 13)

'A lot of work in the OECD is cross-cutting the directorate divisions' (OECD 11). Similar to the Commission, in addition to the horizontal purpose specialisation, the OECD Secretariat also includes horizontal process-organised units. Such units have a horizontal co-ordination function within the Secretariat by providing services of different kinds, such as computer services, legal services etc. OECD officials embedded in units specialised by process tend to evoke a 'helicopter view' of the Secretariat:

> Because I am working in the central service, most of our projects have an impact on all the organisation's substantive directorates, so you have to always communicate with the administrative officers and people working in the directorate to not only get their approval but also feedback on what they think we should do.
>
> (OECD 26)

The horizontal specialisation of the OECD Secretariat mobilises biases in the contact patterns among the staff. Still, the vertical hierarchy in the OECD Secretariat receives most attention among a majority of the interviewees. Contacts inside the OECD Secretariat tend to follow the vertical hierarchy. Most OECD officials consider the middle-managers (see Table 1 above) as key actors in the hierarchy. At the executive centre of the OECD Secretariat, however, the secretary-general and the deputy secretary-general seem to be *less* important in the everyday running of the directorates and teams: 'People tend to have most contact within their team – horizontally – and upwards towards their director. I've got five people working for me, and the director is very closely involved in this as well' (OECD 3).

The WTO Secretariat

A logic of hierarchy is largely absent in the WTO Secretariat. The WTO has virtually no GS, but the General Secretary (Pascal Lamy) has a cabinet of hand-picked civil servants. The WTO Secretariat is a fairly small international bureaucracy with comparatively weak capacities at the administrative centre. One implication is that the behavioural perceptions of WTO officials are less strongly guided by a logic of hierarchy. Interviewees report that the WTO Director-General clearly is powerful, and that the deputy Director-General has

indeed *formal* powers but that s/he is only modestly involved in everyday activities of the Secretariat. The director level is also described as having fairly weak hierarchical control mechanisms and that they tend to give few direct instructions to WTO officials. In effect, WTO officials get fairly large rooms for manoeuvre. Weak administrative capacities at top of the WTO administration render informal communication across organisational bureaucratic sub-units fairly easy: 'The sheer size of the organisation seems to foster flexibility and autonomy among the officials' (WTO 15).

The horizontal and vertical <u>specialisation</u> of the WTO Secretariat accompanies mainly portfolio contact patterns, co-ordination behaviour and cleavages of conflict among the personnel (see below). The logic of hierarchy is largely absent among WTO Secretariat staff. As a reflection of the horizontal specialisation of the Secretariat, most of our interviewees report being primarily oriented towards their unit and portfolio. Although the WTO Secretariat is mainly specialised according to purpose, some divisions are also process organised. As predicted, the interviewees report that horizontal specialisation by *process* accompanies inter-service contacts across units, whereas organisation by *purpose* accompanies a portfolio logic.

> Because of the organisational specialisation, [officials] are notorious for the fact that they become super-specialised like mules with eye flaps – they lose total sight of the bigger picture. So you have very super-specialised people, but they can't sort of get the bigger picture. They are sort of very comfortable in their own little empires. And nobody should come close to them, it is just not tolerated.
>
> (WTO 13)

Even at the level of deputy director-general, portfolios seldom cross-cut the sub-units of the organisation: 'If there is an issue which cuts across more than one of the deputy directors-general, then we just say "Let's meet and discuss this." Normally it's not cutting across' (WTO 14).

The data suggests that the portfolio logic among WTO officials is associated with the horizontal specialisation of the WTO Secretariat. Horizontal specialisation allows more *intra*-unit contact and co-ordination than *inter*-unit patterns of collaboration. Moreover, the purpose specialisation of the WTO Secretariat fosters a 'silo logic' among the personnel. In addition to the horizontal specialisation of the WTO into divisions, the organisational structure is supplemented with teams and projects. According to one official, the team organisation:

> […] has worked to find incentives to break down the barriers to collaborating across divisions, but because a lot of our work is really focused on services of particular committees, it is not always clear that even passing over divisions necessarily adds value all the time.
>
> (WTO 6)

SECTION II: The logic of portfolio

The Commission

Reflecting the <u>horizontal specialisation</u> of the Commission administration, predicted variation is observed between GS and DG Trade officials as regards a logic of portfolio. Whereas most officials in the GS agree that they adopt a 'helicopter view' of the Commission's work, officials in DG Trade mostly emphasise 'silo thinking' and focus on trade issues. This variation reflects the specialisation of the GS as a *process* organised DG on top of the Commission apparatus, while DG Trade represents a *purpose* organised DG with a strong sector focus.

The steering *ambitions* of the GS sometimes exceed their steering <u>capacities</u>. The horizontal interlocking role of the GS tends to collide with the organisational structure of policy DGs. One GS official addresses this aspect:

> There is tremendous power in the departments because of what they know about their policy areas, and their decades of managing and developing policy. There is a large level of experience and knowledge of their areas. And we are inevitably skating on the surface. The most likely role that we will play is to sit down at the table together and squeeze them all to give a bit of ground that they already know. So the departments are very strong. But they can be pulled, of course, into a compromise by each other as much as by us. Proposals from other DGs are far more frequently adjusted and adapted by us rather than blocked or fundamentally changed. We delay people. We tell them their file is not ready because there has to be further discussion, further preparation. They want to run it straight up, get it up for a decision. And we won't necessarily let that happen.
>
> (Commission 4)

DG Trade officials confirm the ambitions within the GS to co-ordinate the Commission services. However, officials in DG Trade report focusing primarily on *intra*-DG co-ordination. One effect of the horizontal specialisation of the services is the emergence of an individualisation of policy formulation within separate portfolios (Bauer 2009: 68).

Even the President says we are thinking in silos and we have a lot of turf fighting. That is, I think, well known and even acknowledged by the President. Barosso says we should now stop with this silo thinking and start working together.

(Commission 7)

As predicted, a logic of hierarchy in the Commission seems largely dashed by the horizontal specialisation of the DGs. 'Silo thinking' is organisationally vested within the Commission services. The stronghold of the portfolio logic is reported by the following official: 'Don't come close to our territory. We deal with taxation, you don't!' (Commission 22). The contact patterns among DG Trade officials are strongly driven by their portfolios. A recent study also shows that *informal* networks inside the Commission is indeed guided by the horizontal specialisation of the services, and largely clustered within DGs (Suvarierol 2007: 118). Moreover, patterns of co-operation and conflict inside the Commission are largely associated with the formal organisational boundaries of the services (interviews). The following quote illustrates the organisational dimension of co-operation and conflict:

Generally, I think there is a lot of conflict really, between our Director and other directorates. I can think of a couple of cases where my Director has conflict with another director, and that affects my relationship with my counterpart in that unit.

(Commission 22)

Next, the formal DG structure also profoundly activates perceptions of portfolio role and identity among the staff. Moreover, this effect is largely sustained and strengthened by a compulsory staff rotation system. Whereas previous research underlines the importance of loyalty towards the Commission as a whole (Suvarierol 2007: 122), our data suggests that frequent staff mobility is mainly occurring across units within DGs, accompanying sub-unit *DG loyalties*, identities and roles. The vast majority of our interviewees reports that their Commission identity is mainly directed towards the DGs and only secondary towards the unit level and the Commission as a whole. One explanation for the DG identification is that the personnel rotation system accompanies fairly short tenure for most officials at the unit level and complementary longer tenures within the DGs as wholes.

I don't identify just with the unit, because I have been here three years and I have done so many other units before. So for me it is one step up in the DG. I have done so many things in this DG, so my identification with the DG is stronger.

(Commission 8)

> I would say [I attach more identification towards] the DG than the Commission. I feel an attachment to the DG Trade, rather than to the Commission as a whole. It is a certain team spirit – the DG Trade – a hard working DG.
>
> (Commission 16)

> There is an *esprit de corps* at the level of the Directorate. I think it is the culture of this work that is already here. It is something that you cannot see, but you have it there. And it has been probably introduced years ago in order to ensure that the 25 different nationalities end up producing the same thing, irrespective of the fact that I am Greek and somebody else is German or French.
>
> (Commission 24 – emphasis added)

A crucial test of H1 and H2 is the extent to which seconded national experts (SNEs) adopt a portfolio logic. Being hired by the Commission for a maximum of four years and having an ambiguous organisational affiliation to the Commission during the contract period, the emergence of a portfolio logic among SNEs is less likely than among permanent officials. Nevertheless, our data suggests that SNEs seem to be strongly affected by the Commission organisation quite quickly upon arrival in Brussels, viewing themselves as 'ordinary' Commission officials (interviews). Interviews both with *current* and *former* SNEs suggest that these officials direct their *primary* allegiances towards Commission DGs, sub-units, and portfolios, and only secondary allegiances towards their parent ministries and agencies back home. Portfolio loyalties among SNEs thus reflect the <u>horizontal specialisation</u> of the Commission services.

> [a]s a secondee you always have a complicated dual position. But I for one, and the people that I know, found a good middle course between on the one hand loyalty to the Commission and on the other hand loyalty to their home country.
>
> (Commission 19)

Another SNE claims that: '[a]s a secondee you are loyal to the Commission. But one's salary is paid by the Netherlands. I had no problems functioning in that dual position' (Commission 24). 'It's probably more about the difference between DG Fish and DG Trade than it is about the difference between being seconded and not being seconded' (Commission 22).

The OECD Secretariat

OECD Secretariat staff tends to attach primary identities towards bureaucratic sub-units and less to the executive centre. A vast majority of the interviewees report their primary OECD identity to be directed towards sub-units and that secondary identification is directed towards the OECD as a whole. Similar to the Commission, the portfolio role and identity perceptions among OECD personnel reflect the <u>vertical and horizontal specialisation</u> of the administration. Our data testifies role and identity perceptions attached to different levels of the OECD Secretariat.

Firstly, quite strong OECD-level identities are observed among OECD officials. These identities are clearly multiple – being directed both towards the OECD Secretariat as a whole and towards sub-units inside the Secretariat. The following quote reflect OECD-level role and identity perception:

> I think [the *esprit de corps*] is quite strong in the OECD. And within the unit or division, of course, the personality of the manager is very important in developing the *esprit de corps* and common purpose. In the OECD I would say that each directorate has its own personality, and that there is a very strong *esprit de corps* in the individual directorates. There is an OECD culture, but the subculture varies from one directorate to the next.
>
> (OECD 9 – emphasis added.)

Reflecting the horizontal division of labour inside the OECD Secretariat, officials tend to attach their primary identity towards the directorate level:
'My division has a strong *esprit de corps*… The organisation is kept largely because of the head office – the Secretary-General's office – and that it's a loose confederation of directorates' (OECD 6 – emphasis added).

However, some officials also report a lack of portfolio identification in the OECD Secretariat. This absence of a logic of portfolio seems associated with the time-limited contracts of the officials inside separate units, accompanying fairly short tenures among OECD officials. Similar to the Commission, the rotation of officials inside the OECD Secretary is reported to hamper the development of portfolio identities at the unit levels. One official reports that:

> I think one of the problems of the OECD is the short-term contracts that make people move a lot from one unit to another. That creates a lack of continuity in the work. This I think prevents having a real own group, own identity.
>
> (OECD 22)

The WTO Secretariat

The <u>horizontal specialisation</u> of the WTO Secretariat profoundly accompanies a portfolio logic among WTO staff. Most officials attach a portfolio allegiance towards units and teams, towards the WTO Secretariat as a whole, and towards the WTO administration writ large. Similar to the Commission and the OECD Secretariat, most WTO officials evoke multiple portfolio allegiances. To some extent, these identities may be seen as concentric circles where identification towards the Secretariat as a whole requires some degree of prior identification towards the unit level. Consequently, sub-unit identities may be seen as foundational for the subsequent emergence of higher-level identifications towards the WTO Secretariat as a whole. Similar to cutting-edge identity research (e.g. Herrmann et al. 2004), officials in the WTO Secretariat tend to evoke multiple portfolio roles: 'I think I sort of walk the line between being a WTO representative and needing to be impartial' (WTO 6).

The WTO Secretariat is a strongly horizontally specialised bureaucracy. Our interviewees substantiate that this horizontal specialisation of the Secretariat leads to strong portfolio identities.

> I have a loyalty to the […] division. It is absolutely fatal for people to stay too long in one single division. It's absolutely fatal. And I see it around me every day. And that's something that needs to be addressed. Why? There is too much comfort, and you fall into a comfort zone if you are dealing with the same issue all the time.'
>
> (WTO 13)

Reflecting the horizontal specialisation of the services, WTO officials attach primary identities towards their portfolios. In addition, WTO officials develop identity towards the Secretariat as a whole and also towards the idea of being an autonomous international civil servant: 'People talk about "in the house" – this place like a house. I think it reflects a little bit a group feeling' (WTO 5).

Lessons from international bureaucracies

This study illuminates that a logic of hierarchy is mainly evident in the Commission administration, and only marginally in other international bureaucracies – such as the OECD and WTO Secretariats. Moreover, inside the Commission, a logic of hierarchy is primarily observed at the executive centre - inside the GS - and only marginally penetrating administrative sub-units – such as DG Trade. Concomitantly, a logic of hierarchy, when observed, does not seem to profoundly penetrate and transform bureaucratic organisations

writ large. Within the Commission, two behavioural logics tend to co-exist, albeit embedded within different organisational sub-units. A portfolio logic seems to be overwhelmingly present within policy DGs – such as DG Trade. The portfolio logic serves as the foundational behavioural logic at the heart of DG Trade and it seems to be activated fairly independently of behavioural logics present within the GS. A previous study of top Commission officials also support this finding, reporting that the Commission is caught between a call for managerialism and upholding Weberian bureaucratic principles (Ellinas and Suleiman 2009: 83). By contrast, a logic of hierarchy are largely absent within other international bureaucracies. The portfolio logic seems to be overwhelmingly present within the WTO and OECD Secretariats. This logic seems to be the foundational logic at the very centre of these international bureaucracies and maybe even the precondition for other behavioural logics to play out (Trondal et al. 2010).

Secondly, variation in the administrative behaviour of international civil servants - both across and within international bureaucracies - is associated with two often neglected variables in comparative government literature: First, the accumulation of relevant <u>organisational capacities</u> at the executive centre (H3), and secondly, the vertical and horizontal <u>specialisation</u> of international bureaucracies (H1 and H2). Administrative behaviour among international civil servants is patterned by the *horizontal specialisation* of bureaucratic organisations. This effect is most clearly seen between the GS and DG Trade in the Commission. However, this organisational effect is also observed in the directorates of the OECD Secretariat. In sum, different principles of horizontal specialisation accompany predicted behavioural logics among the staff of international bureaucracies (H2). The principle of *purpose* seems primarily to foster a 'silo logic' among the personnel. The purpose principle accompanies officials that are strongly geared towards their portfolios and the units they are embedded into. The principle of *process* seems to accompany a 'helicopter view', which implies that civil servants mobilise cross-unit contacts, co-ordination patterns, and feelings of allegiance towards bureaucratic institutions writ large. This latter observation is most clearly reported in the Commission GS.

Contrary to conventional claims, the data presented in this study suggests that administrative behaviour among international civil servants is not patterned by administrative size, legal capacities, socialisation processes, or the IOs in which these officials are embedded. Despite being embedded in seemingly different IOs, a logic of portfolio is observed to the same extent within the Commission, the OECD Secretariat, and the WTO Secretariat. This observation is valid both among permanent international civil servants and among temporary staff. Variation in the logic of hierarchy among international civil

servants seems largely to reflect variation in administrative capacity at the executive centre of international bureaucracies. The administrative capacity at the helm of the Commission administration is significantly larger than within the OECD Secretariat and particularly the WTO Secretariat. Concomitantly, the vertical hierarchy of the Commission administration makes officials more sensitive to a steer from above (a logic of hierarchy) than among officials in the OECD and WTO Secretariats.

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