VALUES, COMPETENCIES, AND PUBLIC SECTOR TRAINING: THE VALUE BASE OF ADMINISTRATIVE MODERNIZATION

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ABSTRACT
The article analyzes current challenges faced by schools of administration in view of value changes at societal as well as organizational levels. Despite far-reaching structural and procedural changes, the set of values, attitudes, and role understandings held by administrators may be relatively impervious to short- and medium-term changes. As a result, this likely gap between required “cultural dispositions” and dominant value patterns presents a challenge to public sector training programs. It flows from this that public sector training programs have to take values seriously. So, the design and management of training institutions and the content and teaching philosophy of their programs need to reflect those changes. Though written from a European perspective and drawing particularly on the German experience, the paper offers primarily a theoretical and conceptual discussion of the role of values, work-related attitudes, and role understandings in governance reform.

KEYWORDS
administrative reform, values, education and training, schools of administration

VALUES, ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM, AND TRAINING PROGRAMS: HOW TO CONNECT THE DOTS
Governance reform programs and strategies for administrative modernization are deeply rooted in organizational as well as broader political and societal values—a fact that is unduly sidelined in much of the international discourse among academics and practitioners about public sector reform. By the same token, value changes in our societies present significant challenges to the established notions of the proper role of government and public sector organizations in our societies and economies. It flows from this that public sector training programs have to take values seriously as one major component of institutional change if their graduates are to make a meaningful contribution to effective governance reforms.

This paper sets out to shed light on the value assumptions of current reform trends in the public sector—notably market-oriented New Public Management (NPM) doctrines and notions of public governance that place a premium on participatory and networked approaches—as opposed to more etatist and bureaucratic models of public administration. We are on relatively safe ground in assuming that current societal value changes seem to be at odds with the established tenets of traditional civil service recruitment and training patterns,
employment conditions, and compensation schemes. Despite far-reaching structural and procedural changes along the lines of managerial reform in the public sector, the set of values, work-related attitudes, and role understandings held by public officials may still be relatively impervious to short- and medium-term changes, thus causing a potential rift between traditionally established administrative cultures and new organizational challenges (Knott, 2013). This likely gap between required cultural dispositions and still prevailing value patterns presents also a challenge to schools and institutes of public administration, because curriculum development in public sector training as well as the design and management of training institutions can be seen as salient ways and means to address those challenges.

In our paper, we write from a European vantage point and draw heavily on a comprehensive study of public sector training courses and institutions in Germany to illustrate the course of the more generally applicable argument (see Reichard, 1997; Reichard & Röber, 2012; for Germany’s public sector and its reform, see also Röber, 1996; Schröter, 2007a; Wollmann, 2000; Wollmann & Schröter, 2000). Often cited as being representative of the continental European Rechtsstaat (roughly similar to English “rule of law”) tradition with a strong tinge of the Weberian heritage, the German case exemplifies both the challenges of a “cultural gap” and the range of responses in addressing this problem through public sector training reform.

After laying a conceptual foundation of value patterns that underscore fundamental doctrines of administrative reform, we suggest three analytical dimensions that may be of help in bringing order to the variety of public sector training programs and their value-related impact: institutional status, content, and teaching philosophy. Taking guidance from these dimensions, we ask how established recruitment and training patterns have been adjusted and modified during recent years. In doing so, we also identify what reform business still remains unfinished if we aim to educate and train future middle and top management in public organizations for the challenges ahead. In the remainder of this article, we search for shaping factors that help explain the trajectory of public sector training reform, or rather the lack thereof.

**ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM AND PREVAILING VALUE PATTERNS**

The label New Public Management (NPM) is widely used as an umbrella term covering a broad range of managerial reform strategies that have dominated the secular trend of public sector change since the early 1980s (for overviews, see Christensen & Laegreid, 2001; Hood, 1991; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). Despite the considerable degree of variation among the broad church of NPM-inspired reform measures, the import of microeconomic thinking and methods into the management of public organizations as well as the leaning toward private sector management as a normative ideal can serve as a common denominator.

Although the NPM doctrine does not prescribe a well-defined list of reform steps, the stereotypical tool box includes measures such as privatization; deregulation; contracting out of public services; competitive tendering and internal competition in service delivery; semi-autonomous result centers or service centers instead of monolithic organizations; the proliferation of hived-off, single-issue executive agencies; result-oriented performance standards and measures based on accrual accounting systems; greater choice for customers or consumers of public services; increased emphasis on professional management in the public sector; and more noncareer staff in senior civil service positions. More fundamentally, protagonists of the NPM reform agenda share highly optimistic views of the steering capacity of the market as the preferred mechanism of social and economic coordination. As a corollary, the shift toward greater competition is seen as a key remedy to increase efficiency and responsiveness in providing and delivering public services.

The life cycle of the NPM movement (see Kettl, 2000; OECD, 1995, 2004; Pollitt &
Bouckaert, 2011) includes phases of reform euphoria but has also gone through fiercely critical debates. In the interim, the missionary zeal and almost naïve reform enthusiasm have given way to a more sober evaluation of the realistic achievements of administrative reform trends and of the potential shortcomings and conceptual deficits of the NPM agenda. In particular, the concept of public governance has arisen as a strong rival on the stage of public sector reform, promising to broaden the hitherto more narrowly defined debate on markets and competition as major levers of reform so as to include more participatory elements (for the implications for teaching, see Hornbein & King, 2012) and network approaches (for collaborative approaches, see also Ansell & Gash, 2008).

Administrative reform, however, is by no means restricted to revamping the incentive structures, organizational layout, or legal framework in which administrators have to operate. Rather, the underlying patterns of administrative culture are of equal, if not paramount importance (cf. the seminal studies of Aberbach, 2003, and Aberbach, Putnam, & Rockman, 1981, for this research tradition; for approaches to organizational culture, cf. Allaire & Fissirotu, 1984; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010; Molina, 2009; Schedler & Proeller, 2007; Smircich, 1983). For the purpose of this paper, we define administrative culture as a pattern of beliefs, attitudes, and role understandings that prevail among members of the public sector workforce (for this approach, see also Schröter & Röber, 1997). These psychological orientations are seen as major factors in the shaping of human behavior, and they are comparatively stable over time and relatively impervious to short-term influences, because they develop throughout an entire socialization process (for the role of values in professional identities in the public sector, see Macaulay & Lawton, 2006; Molina & MacKeown, 2012).

Thus institutional structures and even overt patterns of administrative behavior can be changed much more quickly than administra-
tive culture. For this reason, a comprehensive change of administrative structures and procedures—not to speak of new societal and economic demands—may significantly increase the risk of disparity between the established administrative culture and the newly designed organizational setting of public administration. To perform effectively and efficiently, however, any given public sector organization relies upon cultural patterns that correspond well with internal and external role expectations.

Apparently, different strategies and models of administrative reform are most closely associated with different sets of organizational and professional values (for an overview of the role of values and culture in public organizations, see Bardi & Schwartz, 2003; Davidov, Schmidt, & Schwartz, 2008; Davis & West, 2009; de Graaf & van der Wal, 2008; Heintzman, 2007; Jabe & Zussmann, 1989; Kernaghan, 2003; Maesschalck, 2004; Schröter, 2000; Schwartz, 1999; Vigoda-Gadot & Meiri, 2008). To illustrate this relationship, we refer to three fundamental forms of social coordination: hierarchies, markets, and communities. These models also provide the baseline of alternative, if not rivaling—and in their most extreme variants, mutually exclusive—ways of doing public management (Peters, 2001; Schröter, 2007b). In Hood's terminology (Hood, 1998) —borrowing from cultural theory approaches in anthropology (Douglas, 1982, 1992) and public policy research (Geva-May, 2002; Thompson, Ellis, & Wildavsky, 1990)—we can distinguish between three ideal types of doing public management: the hierarchists, individualists, and egalitarianists.

In the context of administrative reform and their value foundations, these ideal types translate best as (a) notions of etatist-bureaucratic staff organizations that first and foremost feature abstract rules and hierarchies; (b) efficiency-driven, managerialist public agencies that are shaped by incentive structures and competitive market forces; and (c) solidarity-based community organizations that rank high on collectivism, trust, and participatory approaches.
1. Etatist-bureaucratic staff organizations: This ideal-typical image of organization is geared to foster values such as fairness, reliability, and objectivity. Equal treatment before the law, nonpartisan neutrality of civil servants, and their restraint from publicity are also highly rewarded organizational values. The organization itself is meant to be particularly robust and resilient, so that redundancy and organizational slack are not necessarily looked down upon, but rather encouraged as a way of playing it safe. Fully immersed in this cultural setting, the ideal-typical administrator places high emphasis on due process and acts upon input-oriented steering based on abstract rules. Accordingly, the major sources of organizational legitimacy are political support from the top of the administrative pinnacle as well as professional expertise that lends a degree of autonomy to merit-based career bureaucrats.

2. Efficiency-driven managerialist agencies: According to this ideal type, members are supposed to work in a lean organization that pays a premium on individual incentive structures, flat hierarchies, and flexible procedures. Most important, the efficient and parsimonious uses of resources as well as result-based performance management are highly regarded organizational values. At best, the agency’s architecture is designed as a “nexus of contracts” that highlight individual responsibility, an entrepreneurial spirit, and a strongly developed sense of competition as well as a propensity for risk taking. Clearly, the concern is not so much, if at all, with more broadly defined goals (such as the commonweal) or role understandings (such as guardian, steward, or trustee). Rather, it is more short-term and result-oriented reasoning that is rewarded.

3. Solidarity-based community organizations: Not so much a full-fledged and sturdy organization as a socially cohesive group, this ideal type features distinctly collectivist and egalitarian values. Members are drawn to this group because it radiates a sense of belonging, provides a common identity, and establishes meaningful and strong bonds with other team members. Consequently, value patterns and role images are not neatly confined to specialized tasks and responsibilities (as part of a vertical and/or horizontal division of labor), whereas interdisciplinary thinking and empowerment strategies are strongly encouraged. To blend into this cultural environment, organizational members are best equipped with an open mind—as well as the corresponding skills—for a highly discursive and participatory management style.

Given the considerable value differences between the rivaling doctrines and practices of public administration—ranging from well-established professional bureaucracies to more market-driven or community-based notions of public management—we are on relatively safe ground in expecting significant clashes of worldviews. After far-reaching institutional reforms that have reshaped the administrative habitat, incumbent administrators now find themselves confronted with new demands and expectations from political bodies, interest groups, and entrepreneurs, as well as from the general public.

Not unexpectedly, the fundamental institutional change in many countries, including Germany, has left the human resources of public administration relatively unchanged. Most public bureaucracies depend largely on the same cohorts of public personnel who were recruited and trained—in other words, professionally socialized—into an administrative universe characterized by large welfare bureaucracies as direct service providers, etatist notions of government policies, and primarily legalist approaches to service provision. This constellation gives rise to the question of whether civil servants who were socialized into predom-
inantly etatist, legalist, and bureaucratic government apparatuses are adequately equipped for their redefined administrative roles. We suggest that in a great many public sector organizations, a “culture gap” has opened up that stretches out between demands and role expectations emerging from new challenges and administrative reforms on the one hand and established patterns of professional role understandings and organizational values on the other hand.

In this context, questions of how to recruit, educate, and train public administrators fall on particularly fertile ground. The relatively stable and long-lasting effect of job-related values and role understandings is deeply anchored in foundations laid in the formative stages of public sector careers. Administrators are recruited and trained according to certain standards, and their administrative behavior is shaped by specific sociopolitical environments. They bring with them heavy cultural baggage—such as attitudes, opinions, and beliefs—acquired in years of general, particularly higher education. Through these socializing processes, future members and potential leaders of public organizations are exposed to their peer groups, formal and informal rules, norms, and rituals—all of which will leave their imprint on the emerging patterns of administrative cultures. It flows from this that educating and training people offers a unique chance of shaping the contours of their individual cultural dispositions (for value-based degree programs, see also Stuteville & DiPadova-Stocks, 2011). To the extent that our proposed “culture gap” exists, a closer look into the ways of recruiting and training public sector personnel may help explain the existence of this gap and show how to close it at the same time.

**TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATORS: THE CASE OF GERMANY**

**Analyzing the Value-Training Linkage Along Three Dimensions**

Because our primary interest lies with the nexus between the design and content of public administration training programs on the one hand, and the implicit as well as explicit value messages they convey to program participants on the other, we delve into the subject matter by suggesting three potentially powerful factors that may effectively shape the interface between public sector training and values.

**Institutional status and environment of training and trainees.** One way to link academic education and professional training patterns to value patterns they are likely to promote is to look at institutional factors: What is the legal and/or academic status of the training institution? Does it qualify as a full-fledged research university with all the academic freedom that comes typically with this status? Is it meant to be a more narrowly defined professional school? Or can it be best described as an in-house training institution that caters specifically to the perceived needs of the established cadre of administrators? Also, how can we best capture the status and role definition of stereotypical program participants? Do they qualify as aspirants to a promising civil service career, already in the employ of the public sector and preselected for advancement to a steady promotional ladder after graduation? Or are they first and foremost academic degree-seekers with a full range of employment options at hand once they complete their course of study?

Arguably, those insinuated differences among status groups of training institutions and trainees are most likely to have significant consequences for value patterns that will eventually prevail. All other things being equal, we suggest that values typically associated with “classical administrators” tend to be primarily perpetuated and further endorsed by training institutions and their programs that are designed as the extended educational arm of already existing civil service institutions. As prime examples, state-run in-house training programs spring to mind—be they an elite type or more mundane. Not only are they likely to co-opt newly minted graduates relatively seamlessly into established civil service ranks, they also have high probability of setting the “right” incentives for the self-selection of a more orthodox and conventional type of administrator.
Content of training programs. It goes without saying that long-lasting professional role understandings as well as personal and job-related values and attitudes are much, if not mainly influenced by the substance and disciplinary content of the course of study. To begin with, we can try to separate programs that are more vocational and/or professional in outlook from those that foster a rather more academic perspective (or, in other words, we can distinguish programs that are meant to answer how-to questions from those that aspire to more abstract and analytical why questions). In a similar vein of meta-type categorization, it might be helpful to differentiate between educational patterns and training programs that are in essence mono-disciplinary from others that are tailored to suit a larger desire for multidisciplinary or even interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary content (to the extent that these labels do not simply indicate a penchant for playing with words).

At the level of academic disciplines or professional course content, we seem to be on safe ground in suggesting that specific features and proprieties of academic course content will leave their—if not permanent, then at least durable—marks on the dominant attitudinal and value patterns of the cohort of newly minted graduates. To what extent are those academic disciplines and their curricular canonized? Are they predominantly normative or empirical, descriptive or analytical in nature? What set of accepted methods of inquiry characterizes the discipline?

As with the institutional environment discussed earlier, the content of training—ceteris paribus—can be linked to the stereotypical value base of “classical administrators” inasmuch as it promotes the logic of “conditional programming” (as exposed in the mechanistic and machine-type nature of Weber’s ideal type of bureaucratic organization), endorses the legitimacy of hierarchical structures and justifies procedural rigidity. As a matter of fact, professional legal training based on the continental European Roman-law tradition may serve as a near complete match to this depiction of value patterns, but law professors are surely not alone in exposing their students to more hierarchically ordered, mono-causal, and/or technocratic—in other words, bureaucratic—worldviews in the classroom.

“Teaching philosophy” and pedagogical approach to public sector training. Last but not least, the value base that training programs are able and likely to establish can also be interpreted as a function of style, format, and type of training they offer. Picking up on earlier points we sought to make about the value-related consequences of decisions about academic course content, we also claim that methods of instructing program participants can be ultimately linked to general and job-related values that underscore the core mission of the training program. To what extent are the training programs in question designed to offer students a chance to reflect on their course content? Does the curriculum leave room for more explorative or in-depth treatment of case studies, or are weekly schedules entirely filled with “contact hours” in the classroom with students facing their instructors? How much value is accorded to the development of social skills and/or the effective use of communication tools? How much leverage do students have in choosing their own specializations or opting for electives? How does the program as a whole weigh the relevance of on-the-job versus off-the-job training? In case of internships, does the program encourage practical work experience outside the box—that is, in a broader range of institutional or even cross-national and cross-cultural environments?

Again, we claim that those program traits are not randomly connected to value patterns. Rather, a systematic and significant association seems to occur between the prevailing mode of training and dominant set of values and professional role understandings. If civil service candidates, for example, are primarily exposed to orthodox teaching “from the pulpit,” and if they are only prepared for organizational practices and cultures in the public sector, they are more likely to conform to more conventional bureaucratic role understandings along the lines of “classical administrators.”
To be sure, the dimensions we have outlined are not entirely independent of each other, nor can their spheres of influence be neatly delineated. Considerable overlap, for example, exists if we test the relation between curriculum content and “teaching philosophy” as manifested in the general approach to teaching styles and formats. Also, the academic and legal status of an institution of higher learning may predetermine the approach a program is taking toward curriculum development and its teaching philosophy. And yet, we believe that those dimensions identify important explanatory factors—or independent variables—that effectively influence the predominant role understanding, job-related attitudes, and general societal-political values held by public administrators who were professionally socialized by those training institutions and their programs. In doing so, we also contend that those dimensions present themselves as effective levers of change.

Institutional Environment of Public Sector Training: The Case of Germany

As we revisit our analytical dimensions in the following sections, we take our pointers from the German case of public sector training and how it has changed during the past two decades (for more detailed overviews, see Reichard, 2008; Reichard & Röber, 2012; Röber, 2006).

Employment in Germany’s public sector is governed by distinctly different rules and employment conditions than in the private sector. The public sector workforce is in turn divided into two major status groups: One group enjoys genuine civil servants’ privileges and is constitutionally enshrined (civil servants). The other group, public employees, is part of collective bargaining agreements and in principle subjected to regular labor law. The investment in education and training between civil servants and public employees still differs notably as the former status was from the outset designed as a lifelong career and the latter served as a job-based employment category. For the sake of clarity, however, we focus here—unless otherwise noted—on educational requirements and training programs designed for civil servants who significantly dominate employment at the federal and state (Länder) government levels and tend to fill most of the higher ranks in public employment.

Not surprising for a public employment system that prides itself on a long tradition of a merit-based, career-type professional civil service, public sector employment in Germany is essentially organized vertically into career groups or classes, including the executive class (still considered the backbone of the civil service and encompassing most of the middle management positions) and administrative class (starting from the entry level of graduates holding a higher degree through the top management positions). In what follows, training programs for administrative class and executive class members are discussed separately.

For entry into the administrative class, recruitment policies require job candidates to have completed a graduate degree at an institution of higher learning. On top of that, the standard career path for civil servants at this level starts with a mandatory two-year traineeship (preparatory service) during which trainees already temporarily enjoy the privileges of civil servant status. As law graduates, the compulsory two-year traineeship is already an integral part of their training to qualify as a judge, state prosecutor, attorney-at-law, or—in our case—as a junior member of the administrative class. For non-law graduates, similar traineeships are offered. However, this route to the higher echelons of the administrative pyramid is a very narrow one, with an estimated annual intake of no more than two or three dozen candidates in a handful of state governments.

Consequently, Germany’s public sector is in essence outsourcing pre-entry education of new cohorts of future top administrators to large law departments at major public universities. The whole range of full-fledged research universities is used as a talent pool, and students are exposed to an academic environment and have a chance to mix and mingle with the full array of courses offered at large universities.
In the standard programs for middle management in Germany’s public sector, the history of training for executive class members is in part also a history of “academization” of what used to be a primarily clerical job requiring vocational training on top of secondary education at best. Between the early 1970s, when this new college-based training policy was introduced at the federal and state government levels, and the late 1990s, when first-movers at the state government level started reform projects, a standard model evolved and now serves as the baseline for new reform steps.

Today, this model still applies to federal government and 10 out of the 16 German Länder. Because this matter falls in the jurisdiction of individual Länder governments, each Land (plus the federal government) maintains training institutions of its own. The trainees enjoy the dual status of student and civil servant (subject to revocation). The training institutions or colleges, often also referred to in the literature as polytechnic universities, are now classified by law as universities of applied sciences to indicate how their profile differs from full-fledged research-oriented universities.

Moreover, these universities are typically labeled as internal, because their student population and governance structures differ notably from regular or external institutions of higher learning. One reason for this label is that these schools grant access only to civil servant candidates. Another reason is their close relationship to the relevant parent ministries—that is, the interior departments of federal and Länder governments. Those ministries routinely exert a strong measure of influence on their training institutions; they practice a policy of strict control and oversight. The permanent faculty is expected to have—in addition to academic credentials—a well-established track record of practical experience, although adjunct lecturers are usually recruited from public administration and do not typically perceive themselves as part of the academic community. Even full-time faculty members and tenured professors at these colleges, however, find it difficult to engage in any substantial research activities because they have to shoulder an overburdening teaching load.

Turning to more recent changes to the institutional environment, we are beginning to see an emerging and increasingly pluralistic, though slowly developing universe of institutions of higher education that provide general academic education and professional training for future public administrators. In addition to major law departments, a traditional recruitment reservoir, newly designed programs are increasingly recognized by public employers and have been able to establish a name for themselves as adequate qualification for jobs and careers in the public sector. Interestingly, public and private universities are both claiming a stake of this territory.

With regard to the training of executive class civil servants, the most notable development was a considerable outmigration or hiving-off of training institutions and their programs from the auspices of the ministries of the interior to regular universities of applied sciences. Six of the 16 German Länder governments have closed down their internal colleges or transformed them into regular external institutions of higher learning that are open to non-civil-service students. In those six Länder, program participants now fully qualify as members of the academic student community (rather than “civil servants in training”) and we expect that this has an academically liberating effect on those institutions and their programs.

In a similar vein, external universities of applied sciences enjoy greater institutional autonomy from their regulators than civil service colleges from their parent ministries. However, most Länder governments still seem committed to recruiting civil service candidates and delegating them to internal colleges to obtain their degrees. Also, external universities of applied sciences still often must bow to the ministries of the interior inasmuch as they are dependent on their consent to the curriculum of degree
programs that cater specifically to future civil servants.

**Curriculum Design and Course Content**

Legal training has traditionally been valued in the German administrative system as a door-opener to offices higher up in the bureaucratic apparatus. It flows from this that the main source of job candidates for the higher civil service is still those being directly recruited from the large law departments at major (public) research universities. Typically, university students opt for law as a major in their first semester and remain on that track all through their first state exam (typically taken after a completed four-year course of study).

The law departments’ curricula tend to be relatively standardized across the German states (which are responsible for regulating the legal profession) and cover all of the highly formalized and canonized subject areas of private and public law. The realm of public administration as such—let alone the economic, social, and political habitats that public organizations populate—plays at best a marginal role in the curriculum. The role model that this education aspires to is that of a judge with a legal mastermind who applies abstract rules to specific case material by deductive reasoning—just as the mechanistic logic of the Weberian ideal type of bureaucracy suggests.

The subsequent two-year preparatory service is cast in a similar mold; it endorses in a series of practical work stages the generalist perspective of legalist training and requires only one stage in a government authority (e.g., ministry, agency, or municipality).

The law-clad approach to training future higher civil servants also cascades down to the middle-management level. In conjunction with a strong emphasis on (para-)legalistic course content (as a rule, more than 50% of the curriculum) and a premium being placed upon learning the nuts and bolts of administrative practice in extensive internships, the established programs of executive class training appear to be almost perfectly fine-tuned to facilitate a smooth socialization of cohorts of new entrants into a well-oiled bureaucratic machinery. The course of study usually takes three years, including 12 to 18 months of internships in various governmental departments.

As far as curriculum development is concerned, the German public sector has experienced a moderate shift toward a broader base of course content to pick and choose from when selecting candidates for the higher civil service. At the level of research university-level degrees, these changes have resulted in programs that are meant to give a different spin to public sector training because they highlight interdisciplinary approaches; greater choice of electives or concentrations; modules with more emphasis on public management, public policy, or social science-driven organization studies; and finally, broader employment opportunities across sectors and national boundaries. Most notably, close to 15 departments of political science provide master's programs with a major in public administration (often combined with public policy and government). Also, six departments of business administration offer master's programs with a major in public management. In addition, some faculties in economics/public finance and in public informatics/eGovernment provide master's programs that formally give access to the administrative class. Although these newly developed initiatives have been heralded with much fanfare, they currently still occupy only a small niche in view of the bulk of public sector recruiting and training.

We have also witnessed a transitional phase concerning the established approaches and modes of preparing executive class members for their public sector careers. At the entry level for the executive class, even the more traditional civil service colleges have also made adjustments to existing programs or set up newly designed courses of study so as to capture more recent requirements in the light of reforms inspired by the New Public Management movement (see Reichard & Röber, 2012).
In total, internal civil service colleges offer 17 public administration programs, and 12 of them have a clear focus on law application: About 50% of the programs’ content deals with law; about 22% with economics, management, and public finance; and the rest with political or administrative sciences and with skills training. The other five internal programs put more emphasis on public management, but nevertheless they are heavily law biased. Although federal and Länder governments are only marginally interested in graduates with a degree in public management, municipalities obviously show more interest in those study programs. As expected, curricular changes at the now externally organized universities of applied sciences, if compared to internal civil service colleges, have been more pronounced and substantial. As a whole, they offer—often in conjunction with other polytechnic universities—some 22 programs in public administration (17 at bachelor’s level, five at master’s level). Eight of the BA programs have a legal focus and nine concentrate more on public management issues. All of the master’s programs of the external polytechnics have a clear public management focus.

Teaching Philosophy:
Style and Format of Instruction
Arguably, the style and format of instruction has just as much, if not more, influence on the cultural dispositions acquired through training programs as the institutional status and course content. For both civil service classes, a specific mix of on-the-job and off-the-job training appears to be at work. As for the administrative class, the background in legal training is still prevalent. Until the students’ first state exam, the dominant teaching philosophy can be best described as the epitome of orthodoxy in university pedagogy as typified by large lecture-style classwork. The subsequent on-the-job traineeship (preparatory service) includes a series of practical work stages in both public and private sector institutions, and is accompanied by course work on hands-on administrative issues. Teaching is typically organized in compact courses and provided by experienced practitioners—a combination that best serves the aim of socializing new recruits into established organizations.

A similar pattern is discernible at the level of middle management. Students enrolled in executive class training degree programs spend no more than three semesters of at least 2,200 “contact hours” in formal classroom settings, where they quite literally are facing their lecturers. This requirement creates a learning environment that rather encourages passive learning at the expense of more analytical competencies and critical thinking. Almost on par with formal classroom teaching is the required length of two to three semesters of public sector internships that once again help to initiate job candidates into the civil service community.

Regarding the overall teaching philosophy, changes have been under way. Most of them, however, have not been introduced across the board and apply only to specific segments of individual programs or are rather sporadic in nature. As a rule, most of the newly customized master programs offered by public and private research universities or newly established professional schools emphasize the value of research orientation for students; include interdisciplinary and discursive approaches to teaching; and allow for case-study approaches, teamwork, and ample time for self-study, facilitated by generally favorable student-teacher ratios. However, this snapshot illuminates the exception rather than the rule. Despite first steps and sporadic attempts toward skill-oriented teaching and analytical learning in programs at the executive class level, the reality for the vast majority of programs is one of acquiring factual knowledge in the classroom without being meaningfully exposed to more explorative styles of teaching or to organizational and/or national cultures other than those of their future public sector employer.

Closing the Culture Gap in Public Sector Training
The current situation raises the question whether the train of reform that has set its creaky machinery slowly into motion is about
to reach the end of the line after all, or if it is still accelerating and gaining additional momentum. Arguably, there are clear signs, metaphorically speaking, of new “high-speed links” and driving forces that keep the reform-minded movement under steam. However, strong messages from the past and present also hint at all too powerful bulwarks and traffic junctions on the way that may be able to slow down the process considerably—or effectively sideline, if not completely derail it.

From a reform-minded perspective, a handful of pointers can be identified that seem to indicate how the window of opportunity can be opened even wider in the foreseeable future. According to this view, changes of administrative structures and procedures over the past decade or so have resulted in problems of such magnitude that public sector recruiters and trainers can no longer ignore them. They are now, so the argument continues, experiencing the ripple effects of new steering models, new cost-accounting and budgeting techniques, and increased use of contracting out and corporatization of what used to be state-owned enterprises or public utilities. Eventually, public sector training programs will have to follow suit. Although the naiveté of the implied automatism and mono-causality of expected changes will raise some eyebrows, other considerations also lend support for further reform.

First and foremost, much of the credit for opening up new avenues for public sector training goes to the Bologna Declaration and the subsequent process of overhauling national systems of higher education in Europe. The declaration unleashed new creativity and competitive forces on the supply side of providers of tertiary education and training programs. It also opened up a more comparative and international perspective that helped to question the rather complacent attitude of most established program directors. Eventually, it is also likely to have ramifications for the reform of legal training in Germany, because the established “state exam” system does not conform to the Bologna standards. Also, growth of Germany’s higher education system happens almost exclusively in the privately funded sector. In fact, the percentage of students enrolled in private institutions of higher education has more than doubled during the past decade. Clearly, the sheer size of the potential market of public sector training is likely to keep private providers of higher education and professional training pressuring the public sector gatekeepers for greater access.

Reform trends in training and recruiting oftentimes reflect demographic changes as well, and the current situation seems to be no exception to this rule. Seen from this angle, the relatively high degree of stability, if not outright orthodoxy in recruitment and training programs, has to be linked to the highly limited number of new intakes. In most public authorities, a hiring freeze has been in effect for some time now, and overall the size of the public sector workforce has been reduced by roughly 30% since the mid-1990s. The pendulum, however, is just about to swing to the other end of the spectrum as a whole generation of baby boomers retires in the next few years. The increased competition for new talent between private and public sector employers is also likely to change recruitment and training policies to the advantage of more open-minded and externally organized programs. At the most mundane level, speculation about the future of public sector training might eventually boil down to questions of cost cutting. Sending newly hired civil servant candidates to internal civil service colleges as fully paid trainees may be too costly an option for cash-strapped public employers—now and even more so in future.

To present a balanced argument, however, we ought to remind ourselves of the many obstacles that stand in the way of more far-reaching reform measures. Put another way, how else can we explain the strong sense of continuity and deeply rooted traditions in Germany’s landscape of public sector training?
For one, deeply rooted traditions may turn out to be—above all—deeply entrenched and self-serving special interests. It goes without saying that the legal profession holds a strong position as an effective gatekeeper to most of the leading posts in public sector organizations (except for those of a purely technical nature). More specifically, however, the representatives of interior departments and personnel divisions cannot be expected to give up their influence over internal colleges and program budgets easily. Their institutional and professional self-interest can also be couched in terms of “bureau shaping” because their commitment to the existing patterns of in-house training institutions provides them with considerable leverage over the use of financial resources and also gives them—at least indirectly through the regulation of access—a say in personnel in other government departments. The potential power of patronage also comes to mind because ministries of the interior control access to many positions in internal colleges or academies of public administration.

Still more deeply entrenched than special interests are organizational cultures, if we subscribe to the logic of appropriateness as one variant of neo-institutional theories (March & Olsen, 1989). When classic administrative values such as loyalty, reliability, neutrality, or equity rank high on the list, and if hiring, training, and promotion decisions are filtered through the prevailing norms, rituals, and values, we can safely expect that organizational elites and cultures will tend to perpetuate themselves.

We need not resort to sociological or constructivist interpretations of organizational behavior, however, to account for overwhelming forces of inertia in public sector training. Rational actors who are guided in their behavior by a logic of consequentiality (March & Olsen, 1989) may just as well be (self-) interested in new graduates who are already fully immersed in the workings of the bureaucratic apparatus and have little incentive (or rather options) to leave their public sector employer because their highly specific and legalistic training forecloses many alternative employment options.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The thrust of our argument suggests that a potentially significant culture gap exists between value patterns underscoring recent public sector reforms and established job-related attitudes and sentiments among middle and top managers in public administration. Management reform, if at all relevant, is a major vehicle of value changes. Reform measures carry distinct value-laden messages and, if successful, redistribute the relative weight of organizational and job-related values. As powerful tools of professional socialization, however, civil service training programs are among the most effective conveyances to help new cultural dispositions making their inroads into established organizations.

Consequently, this perspective also offers a choice of possible ways out of this predicament, among which the most influential levers of change are organized alongside three analytical dimensions: institutional status of trainers and trainees, curriculum design, and mix of learning and teaching styles. To be sure, we should be quick to mention that the nexus between training programs and acquired value patterns cannot be conceptualized as a trivial connection: we cannot expect to see a linear transformation from public or private status of training institutions, legal or non-legal course content, lecture-style or seminar-based teaching to predominantly bureaucratic, market-oriented, or community-based values. And yet, the specific mix of program features sends a strong signal about which cultural dispositions they amplify and endorse or discourage.

What messages, however, does our analysis convey for policy makers, administrators, or professors who wish to shape their institutions and programs so as to prepare them for the challenges ahead? We identified three broadly defined levers of change that may also help us
navigate the thicket of possible policy recommendations with regard to (a) institutional status of program providers, (b) course content and curriculum development, and finally (c) overall teaching philosophies.

1. Institutional status: Although the public-private distinction does not seem to have much predictive power in separating more adequate training institutions from the rest, it finally comes down to the question of whether schools or institutes of public administration enjoy the full list of privileges of academic institutions or not: Are they granted academic autonomy to develop teaching programs—within the limits of program accreditation or legal supervision—of their own choice? Do faculty members—hired on the grounds of their academic qualifications—have tenured positions allowing them to pursue research agendas of their own? Are program participants students in the academic sense of the word, rather than trainees or civil servants on secondment? Even if the answer to all of these questions is yes, we should be quick to point out that the benefits of this legal status can come to full fruition only if it is underpinned by an appropriate organizational culture in which all relevant members of the academic institution perceive of themselves as just that: members of an academic institution.

2. Course content and curriculum development: A similar line of argument runs through our discussion of appropriate course content. Students’ professional perspectives will greatly benefit from exposure to a rich universe of academic discourses. In a similar vein, their specific training programs—if they address contemporary challenges of the public sector properly—will tend to pursue a multidisciplinary approach in their curriculum design. In particular, they will give students a considerable degree of choice to opt for individual concentrations or elective courses. In combination with multidisciplinary coursework, internships as an integral part of the curriculum (Benavides, Dicke, & Holt, 2013) can assist in broadening the professional outlook so as to include international perspectives and the experience of managing and delivering public services across sectors (Morse & Stephens, 2012).

3. Teaching philosophy: Although the number of contact hours and volume of in-class instruction may serve as an important reference for formal program accreditation, a teaching philosophy that pays a premium on interactive project work, emphasizes research-oriented learning, and provides more room in student’s schedules for self-study appears to be more in keeping with the professional role understandings and value patterns that current and future challenges require. By the same token, the format of exams has to reflect the need for analytic skills and critical thinking. It flows from this that presentations, research papers, and thesis work ought to be an integral part of exam requirements.

Needless to say, these program features are not meant as a simple checklist for the one best training program. Rather, they have to be contextualized in specific political and societal habitats that not only differ from country to country but also, for example, between levels of government. They also have to be customized to cater to the needs and requirements of different public agencies and their specific policy areas. And yet, we conclude from our analysis that training institutions and programs need to consider carefully these levers of change if they take seriously the nexus between the training, values, and challenges emanating from administration modernization.
NOTES

1 As a rule, more than one fifth of all public administrators qualify today as members of the administrative class, and more than half of the total public sector employment falls in the category of the executive class.

2 There is only one privately funded law school in Germany (Bucerius Law School in Hamburg), the output of which is—in quantitative terms and particularly in reference to public sector recruitment—negligible.

3 One driver for this interest is the recent reform of the accounting and budgeting procedures in German municipalities: Almost all municipalities are in the process of changing their accounting system from cameralist cash-based to accrual accounting or double-entry bookkeeping.

REFERENCES


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