Recovering the Craft of Public Administration

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Recovering the Craft of Public Administration

Abstract: *Public sector reform has rarely dropped off the political agenda of Western governments, yet the old craft skills of traditional public administration remain of paramount importance. The pendulum has swung too far toward the new and the fashionable reforms associated with New Public Management and the New Public Governance. It needs to swing back toward bureaucracy and the traditional skills of bureaucrats as part of the repertoire of governing. This article discusses the skills of counseling, stewardship, practical wisdom, probity, judgment, diplomacy, and political nous. Although these skills are of wide relevance, the article focuses on their relevance in Australia, Britain, Canada, and New Zealand. It concludes that the next bout of reforms needs to recover the traditional craft skills. It is not a question of traditional skills versus the new skills of New Public Management or New Public Governance; it is a question of what works, of what skills fit in a particular context.*

Practitioner Points

- We need to abandon the public service reform syndrome in which reform succeeds reform, with no time for the intended changes to take place, no evaluation, and no clear evidence of either success or failure, and take stock of where we have come from before embarking on another round of reform.
- The traditional craft skills of public administration remain relevant today because of the primacy of politics in the work of top political-administrators.
- The craft skills include counseling, stewardship, prudence, probity, judgment, diplomacy, and political nous.
- It is not a question of traditional skills versus the skills of the New Public Management or the skills needed to manage networks but of the right mix of skills for a specific context.

For the past 40 years, many governments have had an obsessive concern with reforming the public service. We have seen a shift from the New Public Management (NPM) to the New Public Governance (NPG). Reform has succeeded reform, with no time for the intended changes to take effect, no evaluation, and no clear evidence of either success or failure. Rather, we are left with the dilemmas created by the overlapping residues of past reforms. So, we need to take stock of where we have come from. We need to look back to look forward. We need to ask, what is the role of the public servant in the era of NPM and NPG?

Westminster governments were enthusiastic reformers of their public services. Indeed, they are all categorized as "core NPM states" by Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011, 124). An important result of the reforms was to push to one side the traditional craft skills of senior public servants. These skills, however, continue to have much utility. We need to recognize that the old craft skills of traditional public administration remain important. The first section of this article provides a baseline for this discussion by describing the main characteristics of traditional public administration and the reforms associated with NPM and NPG. The next section defines the craft. The following section discusses the craft skills of counseling, stewardship, practical wisdom, probity, judgment, diplomacy, and political nous. Finally, the article discusses ways of systematically recovering craft skills and comments on the wider relevance of the notion of craft.

It is not a central aim of this article to criticize either NPM or NPG. It is not a question of traditional skills *versus* the skills of New Public Management or network governance. Rather, we need to strike a better balance between the old and the new. It is a question of what works, of which skills fit in a particular context. The pendulum has swung too far for too long toward the new and the fashionable. It needs to swing back toward bureaucracy and the traditional skills of bureaucrats as part of the repertoire of governing.

This article focuses on public service reform in Westminster governments, although its relevance is

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not limited to them. However, it is not possible to cover all Western governments. This group of nations bear a strong family resemblance (Rhodes, Wanna, and Weller 2009, 9), and they were at the heart of the reforms. They are comparable. The phrase "civil or public servant" refers to public sector employees of national government departments. The phrase "Westminster" refers to Britain and the old dominion countries of the British Commonwealth such as Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. Westminster is a family of ideas including responsible cabinet government, ministerial responsibility to parliament, a professional nonpartisan public service, and the unity of the executive and legislature. A professional, nonpartisan public service is a central notion in any definition of Westminster (see, e.g., Rhodes, Wanna, and Weller 2009, 10, and citations).

Because the terminology varies among countries, the label "politicians and public servants" has been standardized throughout the article. I focus on senior politicians and public servants. In Britain, the top official is called the permanent secretary; in Australia, the departmental secretary; and in Canada, the deputy minister. For convenience and simplicity, the short form "secretary" is used throughout. Similarly, the term for the politician at the head of the department or agency varies. The term "minister" is used throughout. However, *both* ministers and secretaries are interdependent with overlapping roles and responsibilities, each role one side of the same coin. So, following Heclo and Wildavsky (1974, 2, 36), they are also referred to as "political administrators" to stress their interdependence.

From Traditional Public Administration to the New Public Governance

Table 1 summarizes the shift from traditional public administration to the New Public Management to the latest wave of reform, the New Public Governance.

Traditional Public Administration

We turned our backs on traditional public administration; it was seen as the problem, not the solution. Of course, the bureaucracies of yesteryear had their faults, and the reformers had a case (see, e.g., Osborne and Gaebler 1992; Pollitt 1993). For example, in Britain, the Fulton Committee inaugurated the era of reform with its diagnoses that the civil service "is still fundamentally the product of the nineteenth-century" and that the "structure and practices of the Service have not kept up with the changing tasks" (1968, 9). Most notoriously, it claimed that "the Service is still essentially based on the philosophy of the amateur (or 'generalist' or 'all-rounder') and that this "cult is obsolete at all levels and in all parts of the Service" (1968, 11). Margaret Thatcher subscribed to this view (Hennessy 1989, part IV). Yet the defining characteristics of traditional public administration are not red tape, cost, and inefficiency. Rather, the phrase refers to classic bureaucrats working in a hierarchy of authority and conserving the state tradition. In table 1, their task is to provide policy advice for their political masters and oversee the implementation of the politician's decision. Politicians, political staffers, and even some public servants continue to hold important misconceptions about the past of our public services. They forget that bureaucracy persists because it provides "consistent, stable administration," "equity in processes," "expertise," and "accountability" (Meier and Hill 2005, 67; see also Goodsell 2004).

According to a former head of the British Home Civil Service, Sir Edward Bridges, the generalist has four "skills or qualities." First, he or she must have "long experience of a particular field." Second, the individual must have the specialized skills or arts of the administrator, for example, spotting "the strong and weak points in any situation." Third, the civil servant should "study difficult subjects intensively and objectively, with the same disinterested desire to find the truth at all costs." Finally, the civil servant must "combine the capacity for taking a somewhat coldly judicial attitude with the warmer qualities essential to managing large numbers of staff" (Bridges 1950, 50, 52, 55–57). Turning to more recent times, Simon James, a former civil servant, summarizes the required skills as "the capacity to absorb detail at speed, to analyze the unfamiliar problem at short notice, to clarify and summarize it, to present options and consequences lucidly, and to tender sound advice in precise and clear papers" (1992, 26; see also Wilson 2003). Traditional public administration continues to be characterized as an art and a craft as much as it is a science, and public servants are generalists—that is, a profession based on craft knowledge.

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The New Public Management

The past 40 years have seen three waves of NPM reforms (for a more detailed account, see Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011, chap. 1; Rhodes 2011, 23–33). As seen in table 1, the first wave of NPM was managerialism or hands-on professional management, explicit standards and measures of performance, managing by results, and value for

Table 1 Public Administration, New Public Management, and New Public Governance Compared

Paradigm/Key Elements	Theoretical Roots	State Tradition	Unit of Analysis	Key Focus	Resource Allocation Mechanism	Core Beliefs
Public administration	Political science and public policy	Unitary/federal	Political-administrative system	Policy advice and implementation	Hierarchy	Public sector ethos
New Public Management	Rational choice theory and management studies	Regulatory	Organization	Management of organizational resources and performance	Markets	Efficiency, competition, and the market
New Public Governance	New Institutionalism and network theory	Differentiated	Network	Negotiation of values, meanings, and relationships	Networks	Trust and reciprocity

Sources: Compiled from Osborne (2010) and Rhodes (1998). For a similar table showing that this analysis is relevant to the United States, see Bryson, Crosby, and Bloomberg (2014).

money. That was only the beginning. In the second wave, governments embraced marketization or neoliberal beliefs about competition and markets. It introduced ideas about restructuring the incentive structures of public service provision through contracting out and quasi markets. The third wave of NPM focused on service delivery and citizen choice. Nothing has gone away. We have geological strata of reforms. Thus, Hood and Lodge suggest that we have created a "civil service reform syndrome" in which "initiatives come and go, overlap and ignore each other, leaving behind residues of varying size and style" (2007, 59). As one secretary said, "the inoculation theory of reform does not work—you are not immune after one bout." Although the extent of the reforms varies from country to country, and the Westminster countries were among the most enthusiastic, public service reform is ubiquitous. Pollitt and Bouckaert conclude that NPM "has become a key element in many … countries. It has internationalized. . . . In short, it has arrived" (2011, 9).

What are the implications for public servants of NPM reform? The search for better management remains at the forefront of civil service reform, and better management means the practices of the private sector. Two examples out of the embarrassing number available will be enough. The U.K. coalition government's *Civil Service Reform Plan* focused on skills and competencies. The focus was on management—for example, "the Civil Service needs staff with commissioning and contracting skills; and project management capabilities need a serious upgrade" (Her Majesty's Government 2012, 9). Australia had the Advisory Group on Reform of Australian Government Administration (2010) and the Leadership and Core Skills Strategy and Integrated Leadership System (APSC 2014). In both countries, leadership is often invoked and refers to managing government departments.

This obsession with NPM has had adverse effects on traditional skills. For example, Pollitt (2008, 173) gives his recipe for losing institutional memory: rotate staff rapidly, change the information technology often, restructure every two years, reward management over other skills, and adopt each new management fad. All three departments in Rhodes's (2011, chap. 7) study of British government met most of these criteria. He found poor record keeping, the annual postings of the best staff, and high staff turnover. Add internal reorganizations, managerial reform, and especially the successive waves of the delivery agenda, and it can be no surprise that ministers complained about the loss of memory. And ministers come and go, rarely lasting more than two years. From her observational fieldwork in the British Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Wilkinson concludes that corporate memory is the preserve of the bureaucracy; without it, "policymakers lose the knowledge of their constitutional context, departmental history, and awareness of which policies have succeeded and failed in the past" (2009, 14).

The nearer reform gets to the political sphere, the vaguer the discussion. Thus, better policy making boils down to a call for greater "contestability" in policy advice—that is, for advice from competing sources. Under the label "what works," the government seeks more evidence-based policy making (Her Majesty's Government 2012, chap. 2). It does not discuss the respective roles of secretaries and ministers. When the *Civil Service Plan* report touches on the tasks of political-administrators, it can strike a politically naive tone. Thus, upon implementation, it suggests that ministers, who will be in office for two years or less, will delay a policy announcement while it is thought through and civil servants are retrained (2012, 18). The comment "implausible" springs to one's lips unbidden. It is all too easy to hear the impatience in the minister's voice. Indeed, NPM has not had much effect on the behavior of ministers. Pollitt and Bouckaert conclude that "there is an absence of convincing evidence" (2011, 180–81).

The New Public Governance (NPG)

In table 1, managing networks is at the heart of NPG. For example, both the Dutch school (Kickert, Klijn, and Koppenjan 1997) and the Anglo-governance school (Rhodes 1997b) posit a shift from hands-on to hands-off steering by the state. Hands-off steering refers to working with and through networks or webs of organizations to achieve shared policy objectives. It involves continuously negotiating beliefs and exchanging of resources within agreed rules of the game (see also Koliba, Meek, and Zia 2011, 60; Torfing et al. 2012, 14).

The first point to note is that whereas NPM inspired a vast array of management reforms, NPG inspired relatively few reforms in Westminster government. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011, 198–99, 212) see joining up—integrated service provision through better horizontal and vertical coordination—as one of the main themes of reform. It has "grown in prominence internationally since the turn of the century" (see, e.g., Cabinet Office 1999; Management Advisory Committee 2004).

What does NPG say about the role of the public service? What are the new skills? Torfing et al. suggest that the traditional role of the public servants is "supplemented" (not replaced) by that of a "meta-governor managing and facilitating interactive governance" (2012, 156–59, chap. 7). Their task is to "balance autonomy of networks with hands-on intervention." They have various specific ways of carrying out this balancing act. They can "campaign for a policy, deploy policy narratives, act as boundary spanners, and form alliance with politicians." They become "meta-governors" managing the mix of bureaucracy, markets, and networks (see also Koliba, Meek, and Zia 2011, xxxii, chap. 8). The meta-governing public servant has to master some specific skills for managing networks. They include integrating agendas; representing both the agency and the network; setting broad rules of the game that leave local action to network members; developing clear roles, expectations, and responsibilities for all players; agreeing on the criteria of success; and sharing the administrative burden (see also Agranoff 2007; Denhardt and Denhardt 2000; Goldsmith and Eggers 2004; Goldsmith and Kettl 2009; Klijn and Koppenjan 2016; Rhodes 2006).

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manage the mix of bureaucracy, markets, and networks (Rhodes 1997a). The public service needs these new skills, but it is a step too far to talk of these new skills requiring "a full blown cultural transformation" (Goldsmith and Eggers 2004, 178). Indeed, part of the problem is this call for transformative cultural change. As Sir Arthur Tange, former secretary of the Australian Department of Defense, commented, the reformers "demolished or at least fractured the symmetry of the Westminster model" (1982, 2). However, they did not replace it with "a coherent structure of ideas to be a guiding light for loyalties and behavioral proprieties in the Federal Public Service."

Recovering the Craft

Recovering the craft skills is important because reform has been only partially successful. Pollitt and Bouckaert describe the results of reform as a "half empty wineglass" (2011, 155) because we do not have the data about efficiency or outcomes. Reforms have been only partially successful because they have ignored the central role of the minister in running the department. Critics who blame the public service for the slow pace of change should look instead to ministers. They are the main wellspring of change in government, and they are not interested in public service reform. In the eyes of both ministers and secretaries, the job of ministers was not transformed by either NPM or NPG. They continue to live in a world of blurred accountability. As one secretary commented, "the current arrangements are fraught with ambiguities—and remember this suits both sides." Ministers and top public servants are political-administrators dependent on one another if they are to succeed. Public servants recognize both the dependence and the critical role of ministers. One secretary suggested that "clarifying the role of ministers and officials is the major unresolved constitutional question" (cited in Lodge and Rogers 2006, ix, 63).

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Ministers undermine civil service reform in two main ways. First, they lack the political will to drive reform. Politicians make bold statements but often are unsure about what changes they want. When they do propose change, they move on to other policy concerns all too quickly. Also, as Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011, 169–70) point out, politicians are reluctant to stick with the roles allocated to them by the reforms. It defeats the object of the exercise if, after decentralizing authority to bureaucrats, the minister intervenes when something goes wrong. Yet ministers can resist neither the temptation nor sometimes the political imperative to interfere. Public service reform is also a symbolic policy. Everybody loves bashing the bureaucracy. It appears to be decisive action. But effective organizational change is a long slog, and the next election is always looming.

Second, management is not a core ministerial skill. If you imagine yourself in a minister's or a secretary's shoes, performance management does not matter much—useful, but not where the real action is. As Sir Frank Cooper, former permanent secretary in the British Ministry of Defense, observed with characteristic vigor, the minister-as-manager is "nonsense" because "it's not what they went into politics for" (cited in Hennessy 1989, 609; see also Rhodes 2011, 88–90, 292–93).

Indeed, ministers can actively handicap reform. As one secretary complained, "I have been trying to build up management [but it] was just sort of knocked out of the way by the politician." In a diplomatic vein, Pollitt and Bouckaert conclude, any reform that "assigns a new role to politicians is at risk of being embarrassed by their lack of cooperation" (2011, 174).

The third and most fundamental factor is that the reforms do not "fit" the political environment at the top of a government department. The minister lives in a cocoon of willed ordinariness that exists to protect the minister. Private offices, staffers, and top public servants exist to tame trouble, defuse problems, and take the emotion out of a crisis. It was ever thus (see, e.g., Crossman 1975, 618). Protocols are the key to managing this pressurized existence. All are involved in an exercise in willed ordinariness. The slow pace of NPM reform is not because public servants are ill trained, stupid, or venal, or because of a lack of political will, or because ministers cannot resist intervening. It is because such private sector management techniques often do not fit this political context. Reforms are neutered by both bureaucratic and party political games. Such games are compounded by the demands of political accountability and the media spotlight, which pick up relatively trivial problems of implementation and threaten the minister's career. The old craft skills focus more on managing the minister's political environment than on service delivery—hence their continued relevance.

The confusions and ambiguities at the heart of public service reform are all too obvious in a recent public disagreement between the government and the public service in Britain. Francis Maude, minister for the Cabinet Office responsible for the civil service, publicly criticized an internal civil service document setting out the job description for a secretary. The document stated that secretaries need to balance "the needs and demands of Ministers and high-level stakeholders within Whitehall and externally with stewardship of their Department and its customers." Maude claimed that this statement was "without constitutional propriety" and that the civil service should focus on "the priorities of the government of the day." According to the BBC, the document "enraged cabinet ministers" because it contained the statement that the secretary "tolerates high levels of ambiguity and uncertainty and rapid change—and at times irrational political demands." Lord Butler of Brockwell, former head of the Home Civil Service, considered the document accurate and observed that "There is nothing there that I wouldn't have put down in black and white."[1] What is clear is that agreement on either the stewardship role of the civil service or on the proper relationship between ministers and public servants remains elusive. Revisiting the old arts would seem timely.

The Craft Skills

The old craft skills remain essential because they focus on ministers—on meeting and managing their political needs. It was a hard lesson for one secretary who was not a career civil servant. It was the first time he had worked with a national politician, and it involved "a steep learning curve." His position was "uncomfortable," and his "credibility was knocked with the department" because he spent the first year "getting up to speed on the political-management side of

the job." In sum, "what I hadn't understood at that point and which I understand much better now is (a) the [minister] and (b) the political perspective." He had to learn the craft skills and give the minister what he wanted.

But phrases such as "craft knowledge," "generalist public servant," and "profession" skate over the surface of their skills. What is their craft knowledge? If the focus is on the craft, then we need to explore what public administrators do in their specific context—on how things work around here. So, we need to systematize their experience and practice.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary,* a craft is a skill, an occupation, or a profession requiring special skill or knowledge. That is only the beginning when seeking to understand the term. To call something a craft rather than a science is to accept the importance of experiential knowledge as well as formal knowledge. The craft is learned on the job. A craft involves passing on practical beliefs and practices from generation to generation. In contrast to a science, a craft has no one best way. In contrast to an art, it has utility. The craft is learned from a "master," and the novitiate moves from apprentice to journeyman to master. Commonly, a profession—or, historically, a guild—controls membership and regulates knowledge and practices. Much of that knowledge is tacit. It has not been systematized. It is complex. Often, it is secret. In this way, the practitioners of the craft can control the supply and demand for their skills.

In seeking to identify the "traditional" skills, the researcher cannot consult a defining text or definitive survey of these skills, which depend on both individual talents and the context in which they are exercised. Indeed, existing lists of skills are about which skills the public servant *ought* to have in the era of NPM, not descriptions of the skills that public servants deploy in their everyday lives. So, the analysis is based on the skills most commonly discussed in the existing literature, especially on the reflections of practitioners and research monographs reporting interviews with practitioners.[2] Whenever possible, the analysis is also illustrated with the words of the political-administrators at the head of departments of state. As with the example at the beginning of this section, most of these quotes in this article are drawn from a database of some 140 interviews with ministers, public servants, and political staffers conducted with my colleague Anne Tiernan since 2002 (and continuing).

Counseling

Traditional public servants have been described as "mandarins." Their skill lies not "in administering policy but in making it" because of their professional experience, judgment, and independence (du Gay 2009, 360). Their allegiance is to the state rather than exclusively to the governing party, and they provide a check on the partisan actions of ministers. Their characteristics include "party political neutrality," "frank and fearless advice," "integrity and propriety in the conduct of official business," and accepting "the obligations of confidentiality, security and anonymity" (du Gay 2009, 365).

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Political-administrators act as a counterweight to partisan interests and arguments. Here lies a dilemma: when making a minister aware of the problems with a policy, counselors court the danger of appearing to usurp power. They could be seen as putting their conception of the state before that of the minister; they take it on themselves to determine the public interest. For some commentators, that is the role of the public servant. Fesler argues that the public interest is "for administrators what objectivity is for scholars" (1990, 91). So, the political-administrator is guardian of the public interest.

The claim poses some intractable questions. Why should they be the arbiters of what is in the public interest? What is the basis of their claim to act authoritatively? Is it legitimate? Are they accountable? The call for political responsiveness by politicians in Australia sprang from a determination to end the reign of an imperial public service that took too much on itself. In the United Kingdom, it brought the categorical assertion that the interests of the government of the day were the public interest (Armstrong 1985). In both of these countries, and elsewhere, the public interest is seen as the preserve of democratically elected and accountable politicians, not unelected administrators, with public servants in a hierarchical relationship to their political masters.

Scholars have proposed normative models to resolve this dilemma (see, e.g., Denhardt and Denhardt 2000; Wamsley et al. 1990), but such efforts court the danger of missing the point. The point is the dilemma—that is, speaking truth to power, with all its attendant tensions. The public servant's task is not to define the public interest. The task is to challenge. The skill is forensic interrogation or "snag spotting." The grounds for interrogation are continuity of experience and institutional memory. Ministers will bridle at such challenges, but that does not mean they are illegitimate, only unwelcome. The tension is the point. After all, 9 times out of 10, the minister will win.

Stewardship

Historically, bureaucrats in Westminster government were servants of power, not transformative leaders (Burns 1978). Rather, the task of secretaries is to apply top-down authority; they are cogs in the machine. But with NPM came the idea of entrepreneurial leadership—of public servants who sought out ways to improve their organization's performance and sold those ideas to their various stakeholders. Thus, Doig and Hargrove (1987) seek to reclaim the bureaucrat as leader by identifying 12 individuals in high-level executive positions in American government who were entrepreneurial or transformative leaders—that is, they had innovative ideas and put them into practice.

Terry (1995) sees the heroic or transformative model of leadership with the "great man" radically changing the organization and disdaining its existing traditions as a threat to "institutional integrity." An institution has integrity when "it is faithful to the functions, values, and distinctive set of unifying principles that define its special competence and character" (Terry 1995, 44). The task of administrative leaders is to preserve this institutional integrity—that is, to conserve the institution's mission. They must balance the autonomy necessary to uphold integrity with responsibility to elected politicians. Administrative leaders practice "administrative conservatorship" or stewardship (Watt

2012, 9). The practices of stewardship are "a form of statesmanship," which "requires professional expertise, political skill, and a sophisticated understanding of what it means to be an active participant in governance." Or, to employ an everyday simile, public leadership is like "gardening," needing time, patience, experience, and political awareness. They are "quiet leaders" who are in the job "for the long haul." They are about continuity, learning from the past, and preserving institutional memory (Frederickson and Matkin 2007, 36–38). Indeed, much government is about coping, the appearance of rule, and keeping everything going (Rhodes 2011); it is about stewardship.

Secretaries in Australia have heeded this particular call. The Advisory Group on Reform of Australian Government Administration in its report *Ahead of the Game* identified stewardship as an important role for departmental secretaries. They saw it as necessary "to ensure that the APS [Australian Public Service] has the capacity to serve successive governments." (2010, 5). Also, it preserved "less tangible factors" such as "the trust placed in the APS and building a culture of innovation and integrity in policy advice."[3]

Practical Wisdom

Goodsell unpacks the notion of "practical wisdom" (1992, 247). He considers public administration "the execution of an applied or practical art." It is concerned with helping practitioners find the right "tool." Public servants must become *masters* of their craft; that is, they become experts. They acquire this mastery through *practical learning,* which recognizes "traditional craft knowledge is not systematically codified and written down. It is known informally, passed on verbally to apprentices and journeymen over time." Through this mastery and practical learning, public servants build a sense of identity; an esprit de corps—the French phrase encapsulates more than the prosaic English equivalents of "loyalty" and "morale." Finally, this identity breeds pride in one's work and a willingness to accept *responsibility* for it (adapted from Goodsell 1992, 247–48; see also Waldo 1968).

Mandarins do not just provide specific policy advice, although, of course, they do provide such advice. They provide what a former head of the Home Civil Service, Lord Bridges, called "a kind of rarefied common sense" based on the "slow accretion and accumulation of experience" (1950, 50–51). This collective or institutional memory refers to the organized, selective retelling of the past to make sense of the present. Secretaries explain past practice and events to justify recommendations for the future (see also Wass 1984, 49–50). They draw on this memory to spot hidden or unexpected problems—snags. They may irritate ministers, who see it as a delaying tactic. But it is integral to the forensic examination of policy proposals. And politicians recognize its importance, even if, at times, belatedly. For example, the Australian prime minister, Kevin Rudd, when reflecting on his torrid experience in office, also thought that he should have paid more attention to "institutional wisdom."

Of course, there are limits to learning from experience and to relying on institutional memory. As March concludes, "learning from experience is an imperfect instrument for finding truth" (2010, 114). It is ambiguous, constructed and contested. Yet practical wisdom, and the memory and experience on which it is based, lies at the core of the craft of the political-administrator.

Probity

When Kane and Patapan (2006, 713, 719) talk of the Aristotelean moral virtues that are relevant for public administration, they itemize courage, temperance, generosity, magnanimity, mildness, humor, truthfulness, moderation, and wisdom. Harold Nicolson (1950, 126), a former British diplomat, took for granted the virtues of intelligence, knowledge, discernment, hospitality, charm, industry, courage, and tact. The U.K. Civil Service's code highlights the four values of integrity, honesty, objectivity, and impartiality.[4] All have in common the idea that public servants should have the quality of possessing strong moral principles, that is, probity. The lists vary in length and emphasis but honesty, decency, and loyalty are always there. When a colleague revealed secret information, one secretary thought it was "unbelievable" that a man in a "tremendous position of trust" working with the minister had "betrayed" the minister and his civil service colleagues.

Judgment

The ability to make considered decisions is close to practical wisdom, but under this heading, I want to explore a distinctive notion: "appreciation." Introduced by Sir Geoffrey Vickers in 1965, the idea was a pioneering contribution to the role of sense making in organizations (see also Weick 1995). For Vickers, appreciation is the web or net of reality concepts and value concepts that we use to make sense of the observed world and how we communicate in that world. Appreciation is about the mental maps we use to make our way in the world.

The inherited traditions of the organization and the storytelling that hands down that tradition to new arrivals form this departmental philosophy.

Departments have shared mental maps. They are a storehouse of knowledge and experience of what worked and what aroused public criticism. This departmental philosophy can be understood as an appreciative system; it is the net of beliefs about reality through which public servants understand their world. The inherited traditions of the organization and the storytelling that hands down that tradition to new arrivals form this departmental philosophy. It is a form of folk psychology. It provides the everyday theory and shared language for storytelling. It is the collective memory of the department: a retelling of yesterday to make sense of today (see Rhodes 2011, chap. 9).

A craft involves judgment based on practical wisdom because science cannot provide the answers, and the art of judgment lies in weighing the merits of competing stories and spotting the snags. Indeed, these skills can be seen as the public servants' distinctive contribution to the analysis of policy.

Diplomacy

Nicholson defines diplomacy as "the management of international affairs by negotiation" (1950, 15, 116–20). He also identifies seven diplomatic virtues: truthfulness, precision, calm, good temper, patience, modesty, and loyalty (to the government one serves). For all its slightly quaint air, Nicholson identifies an important skill. Diplomacy may be an old-fashioned word, but the arts of

negotiation and persuasion remain current. We have several everyday expressions to cover this skill. We talk about sitting in the other person's chair, standing in the other person's shoes, and looking at the world through other peoples' eyes. As Sir Douglas Wass (a former head of the British Civil Service) said, "finesse and diplomacy are an essential ingredient in public service" (cited in Hennessy 1989, 150). Diplomacy, with its focus on spanning boundaries and facilitating interaction, is an old art in a new context; the skills of diplomacy lie at the heart of NPG. When NPG talks of boundary spanning and collaborative leadership, it is talking about diplomacy in twenty-first-century guise.

Political Nous

Political nous refers to astuteness in understanding and negotiating the political lay of the land. "Public administrators need to be 'crafty,' to fulfil their responsibilities"; they need guile and cunning (Berkley and Rouse 2009, 18). They practice "politics" with a small "p." The dark arts of politics are not the sole preserve of the elected politician (see Meltsner 1990). The secretaries may be neutral between political parties, but they are not neutral either in the service of their department or their minister. Both are territorial. As one secretary reported, "The Minister stands over my desk and says, 'I want you ring up [your civil servant counterpart],' and say, 'I want you to pass a message to [your Minister] which is 'get your tanks off my lawn.'"

Top public servants talk about their "political antennae" (Rhodes 2011, 121). They express frustration when they have ministers less skillful than themselves: "you develop a feel for the political" and "you get frustrated" when you see "how … people who've had a lifetime of this profession … make such a mess of the politics."

They have a wide view of politics. They do not mean party politics and the party caucus. They may be unable to resist gossiping about such matters, but they do not take part. Rather, "politics" refers to the politics of public administration, the core executive, parliament, and the media. All political-administrators must defend their minister and their department in parliament. They must ask, "What will this look like on the front page of *The Daily Telegraph?*" The art is coping. The aim is survival: still being here.

Learning from experience is at the heart of practical wisdom, and it is how public servants pick up their political nous. The point is appreciated in theory by a former Australian prime minister who saw public service experience as the "ideal" training and preparation for the job of his chief of staff (Howard 2001). Yet in Australia, fewer and fewer public servants have experience in the Prime Minister's Office. Departments no longer have staff with experience of working in the networks at the heart of government. Conversely, these core networks lack knowledge about departments. Historically, rotations in ministerial and prime ministerial offices were an essential developmental pathway for officials and a source of practical wisdom for politicians (Barberis 1996). All core executives have opportunities for aspirants for the top jobs to learn from experience and to be socialized into the rules of the political game. Increasingly, they do not take the opportunity (Rhodes and Tiernan 2014). Nonetheless, political nous remains a core part of a political-administrator's craft.

Learning from experience is at the heart of practical wisdom, and it is how public servants pick up their political nous.

Conclusions: It's the Mix of Old and New That Matters

NPM and NPG have introduced valuable reforms. It would be foolish to favor the waste of public money. Better management that seeks to improve economy, efficiency, and effectiveness is like mom or apple pie: everyone agrees it is good, so it is it is hard to criticize. Network governance needs new skills in managing the mix of bureaucracy, markets, and networks. Such meta-governing involves policy narratives, boundary spanning, and collaborative leadership. But in adopting these new skills, we must not forget that traditional skills remain essential and need protecting, for example, institutional memory. Traditional, NPM, and NPG skills all remain relevant. It is not a question of traditional skills versus NPM and NPG. It is a question of what works, of what skills fit in a particular context. This conclusion recaps the main argument, discusses ways of systematically recovering craft skills, and comments on the wider relevance of the notion of craft.

Why do we need a preservation order on the public service? Why are the traditional skills important? To court the danger of oversimplification, management and markets are the priority for NPM, while delivering services to citizens is the priority for NPG. For the traditional craft, the priority is politics. As noted earlier, in Westminster governments, ministers are not managers. That is not why they went into politics. Only a minority take an interest. This simple brute fact undermines reform. At best, it is not a priority. At worst, it is not even on the radar as both confront a world of high risk and 24/7 media coverage that dominates their everyday lives. They live in a closed world of overlapping roles and responsibilities. The distinctions between policy and management, politician and public servant are meaningless when confronted by the imperative to cope and survive. Political-administrators are dependent on one another to carry out their respective roles, each role one side of the same coin. For example, Andrew Podger (2009, 10), former secretary for health and aged care in Australia, spent 40 percent of his time supporting the minister. Every rude surprise shows their dependence. Genuflecting to the opening narration of the television series, political-administrators live in *The Twilight Zone:* "the middle ground between light and shadow … and it lies between the pit of man's fears and the summit of his knowledge." When they have a cooperative working partnership, it is also "the dimension of imagination": the wellspring of policy innovation in the department. But whether their relationship is good or bad, reform of the public service demands clarity not only about the role of the secretary but also of the minister.

The craft persists. In the 1950s, Sir Edward Bridges wrote that it was "the duty of the civil servant to give his Minister the fullest benefit of the storehouse of departmental experience and to let the waves of the practical philosophy wash against ideas put forward by his ministerial masters." In the 2000s, the head of the Australian public service insisted that "we have something unique to offer" and itemized the capacity to stand apart from vested interests and focus on the national interest and experience about what works (Watt 2012, 5). The quotes span 60 years, yet both public servants

share a distinct and distinctive craft. Despite the many challenges posed by the various waves of "reform," their profession continues to offer counseling, stewardship, practical wisdom, probity, judgment, diplomacy, and political nous. Such remarks can be dismissed either as apologia for yesteryear or as special pleading by the public service. No matter, they are still describing the craft of public servants. What we need now is a more systematic account of those craft skills drawing on current experiences, not, as here, the fragmentary historical record.

How do we find out what we do not know about the craft of the public administrator? Ethnographic fieldwork is well suited to this task (Rhodes 2015). It asks the simple questions "how do things work around here?" and "how do you do your job?" Participant observation is the best method for answering these questions, but a combination of ethnographic interviews and focus groups would tease out the tacit knowledge characteristics of all crafts. Thus, the focus groups could comprise recently retired secretaries, and the group interaction would produce the data (see Agar and MacDonald 1995; Rhodes and Tiernan 2014). The skills identified in this article could provide the background and the starting point. Of particular value would be public servants' commentary on one another's insights, experiences, and opinions about their craft. If former ministers could also be persuaded to participate in their own focus group, the contrast between the two would be instructive.

Although the main task is to map the traditional skills, it is not the only task. The mix of skills is also important. This raises several issues. First, reducing the craft of the public servant to seven skills oversimplifies. This article separates the skills for ease of exposition. In practice, they are warp and weft. Where does diplomacy end and judgment begin? How do you counsel a minister without calling on your political nous? The task is not just to document the skills but also to explore how they are woven together in specific contexts.

Also, we need to explore the relationship between the craft skills and NPM and NPG. Can the craft skills help in "managing the mix" of traditional, managerial, and networking skills? As noted earlier, the reforms have both intended and unintended consequences. NPG provides a new context for diplomatic skills, whereas NPM erodes institutional memory. Moreover, all may not be as it seems on first inspection. It may not be the role of secretaries to manage any network. Rather, as the heads of central agencies, they manage a group of networks—a "multi-network portfolio" (Ysa and Esteve 2013). As the repository of institutional memory and its stewards, the public service can coordinate the portfolio. No minister will have a map of the department's networks or stay long enough to master such detail.

The most important skill of all is the ability to choose between and manage the mix of skills, whether traditional, NPM, or NPG. At the heart of public servants' craft is the ability to learn from experience and alter the mix of skills to fit both the specific context in which they work and the person for whom they work. The traditional skills of bureaucrats need to be part of public servants' training, and of the repertoire of governing (Goodsell 2004).

This article focused on Westminster governments because the world was too broad a remit. But the traditional craft is not confined to Westminster governments. The label "generalist" is not specific to them. Thus, Heclo (1977, 2–3) talks about the "craft knowledge" of the high-ranking Washington bureaucrats: about "understanding acquired by learning on the job," not through specialist training. Goodsell (1992, 247) describes American public servants as "artisans," or masters of "an applied or practical art." So, the idea of the craft has the potential to travel well. The final research question is how well and how far it travels.

The bureaucracies of yesteryear were not a golden era, but they had some virtues. They were home to statesmen, albeit statesmen in disguise. Given that we so love dichotomies such as steering not rowing, it is now time for new one. NPM and NPG are about the low politics of implementation, and the craft is about the high politics of serving the minister. We have had an era of thinking small. It is time to think big again and return to the craft—to statecraft.

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Notes

1. See "Indicators of Potential for Permanent Secretaries." The document was produced by YSC, business psychology consultants, for the U.K. Cabinet Office, available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/07_07_14_permanentsecretary.pdf (accessed November 10, 2015). The comments by Maude and Butler can be found in "Francis Maude Attacks Civil Service over Job Document," BBC News, July 7, 2014, available at http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-28202293 (accessed November 10, 2015). These debates are common to most Westminster systems. For a comparative review, see Rhodes, Wanna, and Weller (2009).
2. See, for example, Barberis (1996); Bridges (1950); Butler (1992); Campbell and Halligan (1992); Campbell and Wilson (1995); Lodge and Rogers (2006); Podger (2009); Rhodes (2011); Savoie (2003); Shergold (2004); Wanna, Vincent, and Podger (2012); Wass (1984); Watt (2012); and Wilson (2003).
3. On Australia, see the Public Service Act 1999. On the United Kingdom, see the Civil Service Code, available at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-code (accessed November 10, 2015).
4. Available at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-code (accessed November 10, 2015). On the values of the APS see: http://www.apsc.gov.au/publications-and-media/current-publications/aps-values-and-code-of-conduct-in-practice (accessed November 10, 2015).

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