

March 2010

Paper prepared for PSA Edinburg, April 2010

Acceptance of Administrative Change in the European Commission

—DRAFT—

Abstract: The paper tackles the question how officials of the European Commission relate to the recent management modernization (Kinnock reform). Competing explanatory approaches (opportunity, learning, and ideology) are used to develop empirical hypotheses about the relationship between officials and their acceptance of or opposition to the administrative reform. The hypotheses are tested on EUCIQ survey data by applying a simple regression model. There is evidence that—unless they fear negative effects on their career—Commission officials accept the administrative reform rather well (the higher their position in the organizational hierarchy the better). With respect to recent organizational change, the Commission appears to have entered into an age of normalization.

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1. Introduction¹

In the 1980s and 1990s the Commission remained resistant towards the new public management wave which affected virtually all member states of the European Union (Pollitt/Bouckaert 2004). Perhaps as a result of this lengthened resistance to administrative modernization the catch-up process the Commission went through in the 2000s has been more intense and probably more painful than in many other national public administrations (Kassim 2008; Balint/Bauer/Knill 2008; Ellinas/Suleiman 2008).

In a previous study about heads of unit of the European Commission (Bauer 2008, 2009b) I found that only a small fraction of middle managers welcomed recent administrative modernization; another fraction took a position along a more neutral line like “esprit est bon, la mise en oeuvre moins car elle crée un surplus de la bureaucratie [...] parfois amène à la diminution de l’effectivité”. In that study the majority of middle managers however turned out to be unambiguous opponents to the Kinnock reform. They summarized the “Kinnock reform in one word: bureaucracy”. One of the more friendly comments of that category was that “many heads of unit feel they have to carry the heavy burden of bureaucratic, ineffective procedures that were introduced.” Others were sharper: “Kinnock is a disaster and a 300% bureaucracy increase with form accounting for 80% and substance just for 20%”, it is “paperwork that nobody reads” or just “unproductive paper work”. Others talked about a “control mania” inside the Commission which “creates a culture of fear”; “control should be on a reasonable level: now it went mad”. Many statements

¹ I am grateful to Francesca Gains, Morten Egeberg, Jarle Trondal, Didier Georgakakis and Fabrice Larat for comments and indebted to my EUCIQ partners, Liesbet Hooghe, Hussein Kassim, John Peterson, Andrew Thompson, Renaud Dehousse for their support; I am indebted to Philipp Studinger for his help with the data.

reflect the fear that the Commission loses its “political duties”, “political priorities”, “political function” and that the “original mission is forgotten”. The “real problem is that process has become an aim in itself”; there are “lots of words, declarations, announcements which lead to nowhere, there is no increase in productivity”.²

Obviously, it is a challenge to any organization if a majority of staff opposes consistently and continuously organizational change which the leadership thinks is crucial. Such opposition carries always the danger of paralysation. That in the case of the European Commission paralysation appears not just a lofty hypothesis but a true risk underpin the assessments by managerial staff as collected above. However, the previous study was based on few more than 100 interviews, all from a particular rank, i.e. heads of unit with policy drafting responsibility. The question thus arises whether officials from all levels and positions think in a similar way and whether, after some more years in operation, the judgement about the Kinnock reform is still as negative as it appeared to be in 2006. The general question of this article thus is how have the Commission officials coped with the Kinnock modernization shock by now? More specifically, how can one explain staff acceptance *of* or opposition *to* recent management modernization within the European Commission?

The paper proceeds as follows. After this introduction a brief reference is made to the Kinnock reform (section 2). I will then discuss theoretical approaches that promise to contain analytical leverage in view of my research question, i.e. to find out why some officials endorse particular managerial change more and others less (section 3). Section 4 starts with briefly introducing the survey from which the data is taken and then describes the applied research design. The regression analysis and its

² The quotes are opinions of heads of unit about the Kinnock reform effects, see Bauer 2008, 700.

discussion follow in section 5. The paper concludes by putting the results in a broader theoretical and empirical perspective (section 6). The central empirical insight is that the reception of the recent administrative change by the staff of the European Commission appears by now much less negative than most of the literature thus far acknowledges. The Commission officials appear to have got used to the administrative changes recently implemented. It seems thus time to “de-dramatize” the Kinnock reform and to acknowledge that some kind of normalization has taken place and new broadly-accepted routines have emerged.

2. Kinnock Meant Dramatic Management Change for the European Commission and its Staff

The history of management change in the Commission appears mainly one of missed opportunities. The problems have been known roughly since the late 1970s (Spiereburg report), but only under the presidency of Jacques Santer did reform efforts intensify. Implementation however dramatically failed in the context of the row with the European Parliament about the discharge for the liability of the budget of 1997. For Santer’s successor Romano Prodi and his reform Commissioner and Vice-president Neil Kinnock settling the issue of internal reform thus became a top priority.

The result of the subsequent intensified efforts was the so-called Kinnock reform (Kassim 2004a,b; Levy 2006). It comprised four crucial issues (personnel, strategic planning and programming, financial management, and transparency and ethics). The major changes were implemented between 2000 to 2004, but still in 2004 to 2009 the Commission was busy to cope with reform leftovers and even started some

re-reforming (especially in the area of staff appraisal, see Ban 2008a,b) (for general overviews see Kassim 2008, 2004a,b; Metcalfe 2000; Bearfield 2004; Levy 2006).

The reform is perhaps best summarised as changing the Commission from a continental-style, late Weberian bureaucracy towards an administration model à la new public management (Balint/Bauer/Knill 2008). Some kind of managerial change was certainly overdue as the Commission—despite task expansion and changing tasks—with respect to internal management stood practically still over the previous 40 years (Metcalfe 1992; but see Bauer 2007; Bauer/Heißerer 2010). Given the intensity of internal changes the judgment “historic” for the reform appears no exaggeration (Kassim 2004a).

In effect, the Kinnock reform meant an increase of internal horizontal and vertical coordination and control mechanisms with the aim to optimize top-down political management (Schön-Quinlivan 2008).

Take, for example, the chapter on Strategic Planning and Programming (SPP), a cornerstone of the reform. The intention was to replace the traditional—Weberian—way of organization with strategic priority setting (on the basis of updated information about what exactly is done in the Commission and by whom), respective resource allocation, process monitoring, evaluation and—inherently related to these—redistribution of financial and personnel resources on the basis of this programming cycle. One notes that activity-based cost management (Cokins 1996) is still output- rather than outcome-focused. But it is already a far cry from the rather non-transparent input steering that the Commission applied in the past.

The SPP cycle has been running since 2003 and “has put policy priorities at the heart of the decision-making. [...] Managers are required to focus on the need to deliver on priority objectives and to report on achievements and performance” (Commission 2000: 6). The SPP cycle is indeed a challenge. Means and needs have to be justified in the light of the targeted objectives. A detailed Annual Policy Strategy (APS) is drafted, discussed and agreed upon through a process that involves virtually all the layers of the internal administration in a huge communication and coordination exercise. The APS is translated into mission statements and work programmes for each Commission service, setting out specific objectives for directorates and units. In response, each DG or service requires Annual Activity Reports that include strategic evaluations of activities, expenditure and so forth up and down the hierarchy (Kassim 2004a: 48). Tasks like producing proposals for policy objectives, conceiving (measurable) progress and quality indicators, conducting impact assessment exercises, suggesting priorities, drafting respective reporting notes, evaluating and communicating decisions back to the units and to staff mean—at the very least—that all layers of staff in the Commission have to cope with intensive change.

The personnel chapter constitutes another centrepiece of the modernization blueprint, given that budgeting, programming and coordination aspects have personnel implications and vice versa. The linearization of careers, i.e. less obstacle to change between staff categories and the proliferation of more but smaller promotion steps in the individual career, as well as the new pension regime were among the most contested issues (Kassim 2004a,b; Bauer 2007). The aims were to keep staff motivated until very late in their individual careers and to keep the costs for salaries and pensions in check.

Whether in the area of personnel management or in the context of strategic planning or financial management modernization, the Commission has been changed from input- to output-style management. The top management shall be empowered to vertically set priorities and to monitor (and intervene, if necessary) early on in horizontal coordination and the whole administrative policy production process. This also means that lower layers in the hierarchy have to provide much more rigorously than in the past the necessary information in a continuous and comprehensive way in order to enable senior managers to analyse, assess and eventually intervene with greater precision and effect.

It is not possible to cover the Kinnock modernization in more detail here. But it should have become clear that the recent managerial change in the Commission was comprehensive, controversial, and affected in practice all individuals working in the Commission. A change of this magnitude is unlikely to leave public servants indifferently who have to cope with the impact of change extensively in their day-to-day working lives. Thus the question becomes crucial which theoretical approaches allow us to derive systematic expectations about individual attitudes towards organizational change.

3. Explaining Elite Preferences: Theoretical Approaches

To produce positive results organisational change needs the back-up of the personnel of an organisation. Little or no acceptance of organisational change by huge parts of the personnel endangers not only the “success” of certain reforms, but in the medium- and long-term perspective even the survival of the organisation itself.

The question how and why staff oppose or endorse organisational change is thus of great practical and theoretical importance. The Kinnock reform meant without doubt a landmark change for the Commission and its personnel. The question then is how in the concrete case of the European Commission as an international administration to theorize the potential relationship between individual Commission staff and organisational change? Which theoretical approaches allow us to derive systematic expectations about individual attitudes towards organizational change?

There is a rich tradition of studying what can be summarised as belief systems of political elites. While international civil servants up to now have not received a lot of attention, national administrators, government leaders, party leaders and European parliamentarians did (Converse 1964; Derlien 1996; Lau/Sears 1986; Hix 2002). In case of public officials who are the focus of this study the rule of thumb is that the closer they get to the political sphere, the greater becomes the academic interest in their individual dispositions, social background, education, career paths or political attitudes (Aberbach et al. 1981, 2006).

The interest in this kind of research rests on the assumption that individual attitudes or dispositions sometimes summarized under the term “belief system”—once developed—are reflected in the individual’s actions (Putnam 1976). But this assumption, and also what its implication might be when a large number of individuals form an organization, is not shared by everybody. Some researcher find it intuitively plausible that, for example, individuals trained as economists might be more likely to base their policy proposals on certain propositions about how the world works and the humans in it behave, while individuals trained as political scientists

may base their proposals on others—and thus organizations like the IMF on the one hand and the World Bank on the other may develop quite different responses to similar policy problems. There are however also researcher who are sceptical about the insights which can be drawn from investigating individual attitudes; either because the link between an individual's attitude and concrete action can never be directly observed and must thus remain outside the focus of serious empirical research, or because in the case of attitudes of members of an hierarchically structured organization (like an public administration) any latitude of individual discretion will be streamlined in the very process of administrative decision-making. In other words, because a public administration is an instrument based on a hierarchical form of organization, individual dispositions on lower levels of the hierarchy may not matter much.

Before this background it is probably no surprise that so far the question how opportunity structures, formative years, social background or alike do coin the emergence of individual attitudes (attitudes as dependent variable) has been more, and more successfully tackled than the question what difference varying patterns of individual attitudes actually do make (attitudes as independent variable). But it is also obvious that only by reaching more solid ground with respect to the first question (what explains individual attitudes) will we stand a chance advancing with view to the second (what varying individual attitudes explain).

With respect to the question what explains belief systems of political elites there are two classical positions, one rests on economic theory and the mechanism of utility maximization, the other on sociology and the mechanism of socialization. Given their ontological origins these two positions appear difficult to reconcile. Indeed, they have

been set up in sharp conflict, i.e. as theoretical competitors, in order to explain individual attitudes. Currently however research informed by, among others, political psychology and neurobiology, questions the usefulness of such a concept of mutual exclusiveness (Mansbridge 1990; Sears 1993; Sears/Funk 1991)³.

What are the consequences of the state of the art in belief system research with view to the question how individual administrators within the Commission relate to organizational change? The point is that researcher currently do both, they work on refining the classical positions (utility maximization and socialization), while at the same time they look for new ways to bridge the ontological gap between self-interest and social explanations in order to come to a more realistic understanding when and under which conditions human beings tend to follow the one logic or the other.

With respect to elite preference to organizational change that constitute the empirical focus of this paper the point is that indeed the classical concepts of utility maximization and socialization appear too abstract, almost like taking a sledgehammer to crack a nut, as to allow to derive meaningful hypotheses for empirical testing. Thus, we need refinement and if possible, some kind of innovation.

Utility maximization, as has been pointed out already, if not used very narrowly can be designed to account for quite a broad range of different expectations depending

³ I confine my analysis to perspectives based on debates in political science and public administration. There are however studies in organizational sociology and organizational psychology that could be related to the issue (for overviews to current debates see Piderit 2000; Cunningham et al. 2002; Herscovitch/Meyer 2002). Organizational sociologists and psychologists attempt to explain more generally "readiness" to (any kind) of organizational or program change by macro organizational structures or micro-level, general individual dispositions (for example job satisfaction, or active/passive approach to job problem-solving). The empirical objects of these studies are, as far as I can see, usually street-level bureaucrats working in implementation rather than elite officials working in political planning. Moreover, change is usually conceived as issue specific (policy content, specific procedures in the production of a particular service) rather than as fundamental organisational shift like the Kinnock reform.

on what actually is “packed” into the individuals’ utility function. The same is true for socialization that may comprise formative experiences, group dynamics or active forms which are perhaps better conceptualised as learning. Furthermore, obvious “reference systems” or “intellectual shortcuts” like ideological dispositions have recently been put forward in order to explain preference patterns that the pure dichotomy between self-interest and social embeddedness so far was unable to make sense of. I thus suggest to employ for the empirical analysis of Commission officials’ acceptance of organizational change the concepts of opportunity, learning and ideology to which I will now briefly turn. Each of those explanatory programs makes different claims about how elite attitudes do form and employs a different mechanism how particular characteristics of staff (for example current position, prior education or philosophical views about European integration) may coin Commission officials’ assessment of the Kinnock reform.

Opportunity

What I understand under opportunity is the core of “utility maximization”. Accordingly, the formation of preferences is subject to an individual cost-benefit calculation. As soon as opportunity structures change, individual preferences may adapt to the altered circumstances (“logic of consequentiality”; see March/Olsen 1989: 160f.). The point however is that whatever the exogenous change is, it should be perceived to have (concrete and relatively easy) identifiable repercussions for the individual. In our case the implication of an organizational reform for the “well-being” of an individual should lie in the professional opportunity structure it creates, or, more precisely, it should be crucial whether organizational change is perceived as advantageous or disadvantageous for the job itself or the career perspectives of an individual.

It appears plausible that the Kinnock reform, as a new public management reform, produces and re-distributes “professional” costs and benefits vertically. Put simply, the higher in the hierarchy, the more positive one should feel about the reform; because (as we saw above) managerial information has to be painfully produced at lower levels and transported up-wards in order to serve as the basis for improved organizational decision-taking at the top. Rank and file as well as middle management pay the price in terms of more coordination and more information production; top managers enjoy the greater steering capacity because they have an apparently improved informational basis for their policy decisions. Moreover, as the Kinnock reform reconstructs the whole career advancement system, people who feel disadvantaged by the new ways of doing things, are unlikely to have great sympathy for recent organizational change.

Opportunity Hypotheses

As the administrative reform re-distributes costs and benefits of organizational change vertically and affects individuals’ career advancement a first hypothesis focuses thus on hierarchical rank (middle manager and senior manager) and expects: The higher an individual stands vertically in the hierarchy, the greater the acceptance of reform. A second hypothesis puts the individuals’ perception whether the individual career is helped or hindered by the reform centre stage; those who are convinced that in the context of administrative reform their individual career advancement is negatively affected should demonstrate lower acceptance of the reform than those who see no such connection (career perspective).

Learning

Sociology and psychology conceive the formation of preferences as an endogenous process. The core assumption is that individuals develop preferences by internalizing norms and values of their social environment—often early on in their lives (Converse 1964; Johnston 2001; Loveless/Rohrschneider 2008; Rohrschneider 1994; Wildawsky 1987). The mechanism at work is usually conceived of as “socialization”; but quite similar as in the case of “opportunity”, socialization conceptually stretches over a number of different phenomena. Socialization regularly gets equated with effects of “group dynamic”, i.e. the way norms and values of the in-group are taken over by a (new) individual; often the “in-take” of norms is thought to work automatically, especially in the formative years (social class, particular university education, particular discipline, for example if an individual is trained as a economist etc.). Recently researcher rather than to use the notion of socialization employ learning theory to account for the observation that there appear to be “active” and “passive” forms how an individual may take on certain norms and values from its environment.

Applying this to our research puzzle, one can argue for example that new public management reforms have come to be implemented firstly and most intensively in the UK and in northern Europe. Commission officials from these countries may thus have had the possibility to become familiar with crucial elements of this organizational change and thus accept it better than those officials who come from a NPM-laggard country. The point here is that any kind of organizational change usually meets with resistance from staff; “people” at the aggregate level are always coined by certain inertia. Thus, those who have “learned” to cope with certain kinds of

change may indeed display less opposition to it—whatever the actual content of that organizational change is. Moreover, the NPM character of the Kinnock reform means that it actually rests on an economic rationale. NPM stands for transferring concepts from business administration into the sphere of public administration. Accordingly one should find those officials with experience in the private sector to be more in favour of the reform than those who have never worked outside public administration. In short, those individuals who had the chance to learn to handle NPM should have fewer problems applying it within the Commission.

Learning Hypotheses

An individual is supposed to learn from experience in different environments; a first hypothesis focuses thus the relationship between national administrative traditions and individual reform attitude. As the modernization of national public sectors has been pursued more intensively in some countries than in others, individuals from those countries that embraced NPM reforms are likely to endorse the Kinnock reform, too; the opposite is to be expected from individuals from NPM-laggards (administrative tradition).

A second set of hypotheses expects that work experience in the private sector or professional training in economics will boost reform enthusiasm. Kinnock is a NPM reform, professional experience in the private sector or training as an economist makes an individual more familiar with management devices and culture, and thus such individuals should endorse the Kinnock reform more than others who did not have the chance to learn to handle and apply private management rules and procedures (work experience in private sector and economist).

EU Ideology

Utility maximization and learning need a kind of direct intellectual or practical exposure to a stimulus; on the basis of this “direct link” an individual is expected to be able to position itself. What happens however in the absence of such direct calculative or educative links? Is the individual then condemned having no position at all, or, as in the case of learning in our example above, should we expect an individual without direct linkage always automatically to resist any kind of change on the basis of unfamiliarity? What else could have a systematic influence on an individuals’ position to some kind of change? I think “intermediate” factors as they have been identified in research on mass attitudes could be this missing (indirect) link. The argument there is that individuals (who have no direct individual exposure and no means or desire to invest to establish one) turn to “proxies”, “cues” or “heuristics”—often in form of ideologies—in order to position itself to new aspects of their environment (Anderson 1998; Hooghe/Marks 2009).

For example, whether or not somebody likes the actual process of European unification is sometimes conceived of as a function of his conviction on a continuum between market liberalism and social interventionism. Before the background of this general proposition Liesbet Hooghe examined whether Commission top officials’ convictions as supranationalists or intergovernmentalists changed in accordance with the time they spend working for the Commission, i.e. whether within the Commission something like a socialization towards “supranationalism” takes place (Hooghe 2001). Her answer is „rather not“ (Hooghe 2001, 2005). In my view Hooghe thus produced evidence that the crucial question about the *finalité* of the European Union is usually

answered on the basis of relative stable ideological dispositions which the officials „bring with them“ and which „stay with them“ throughout their career.

The implication of this point for my research puzzle is important. There may be some kind of self-selection when Commission personnel get recruited (Europhile Commission officials recruit other Europhile Commission officials). However, there is only weak evidence that officials *change* their view on the European Union *as a result of* their working within the European Commission.⁴ Put bluntly, officials appear to stick to their conviction with regard to their personal preferred governance order for the European Union regardless of the fact that they are actually employed by an institution that obviously has a particular organizational interest in this issue.

From the common vantage points of intergovernmentalism and supranationalism one can now derive quite clear and competing „cues“ with respect to the role the Commission in general and about the likely acceptance of the Commission’s administrative reform in particular. Supranationalists usually want to see a powerful and entrepreneurial Commission. By contrast, intergovernmentalists see the Commission as the agent and the Council in the leadership role. The implication for the individual interpretation of the Commission reform is the following.

As became clear during leading interviews with Commission officials about the recent administrative modernization (see the evidence presented in the introduction above), the narrative dominates that the Commission has been purposely weakened by the

⁴ Hooghe’s truncated sample, the lack of panel data, the confounding influence of other factors etc. makes it very hard to prove the presence or absence of socialization in some definitive way. In her 2005 article Hooghe highlights another factor: the rapidly changing political and organizational environment – institutions in flux are never fertile soil for socialization since the cues they provide are in flux as well.

Kinnock reform (Bauer 2008). Supranationalists mourn about the time of Jacques Delors and the then pro-active Commission and equal the Kinnock reform with a weakening of the institution and with the loss of its “true mission”. The Kinnock reform is often seen as a perfidious strategy of deliberate over-bureaucratization in order to paralyze the Commission and distract staff from engaging in integrationist projects.

Ideology Hypotheses

Officials within the Commission—and I talk only about what is called “administrators”—are undoubtedly an elite who live European integration in their day-to-day working reality. The ideological categories of supranationalism and intergovernmentalism are familiar to them. Quite often in their career they will have to consider the real world implications behind these concepts in order to successfully do their jobs. Before this background the hypothesis expects that individuals who lean towards supranationalism as their model for the future European political order, should show rather low acceptance of the recent administrative changes within the Commission. This is the case because the supranational logic of integration favours strong European institutions, and the administrative reform has been interpreted as a weakening of the Commission, supranationalists should thus have little sympathy for administrative reform, while intergovernmentalists for the same reason may well like it (supranationalism).

Related to that argumentation one may also see those officials who see the mission of the Commission in furthering European unification with the help of integrationist projects (basically old-school neo-functionalists) displaying little support for the recent administrative change (entrepreneur).

4. Research Design

Three sets of hypotheses (opportunity, learning, and ideology) could be identified that deliver competing expectations about the relationship between Commission officials and their acceptance of recent administrative change. It is however to the introduction to the data source and the specification of the dependent variable to which I now turn.

The data stem from the EUCIQ survey.⁵ The EUCIQ team is dedicated to study the European Commission as an organisation in the governance context of the European Union of today. The team developed a questionnaire of about 30 “closed” questions (with a considerable number of sub-questions) to several important topics like inter-institutional relationships, internal horizontal and vertical coordination, effects of enlargement—and also about recent administrative reforms within the European Commission. The sample of 4000 Commission officials has been carefully constructed as disproportionate stratified random sample.⁶ The survey was conducted as an online interrogation with the help of YouGov—a UK-based private polling firm. With the agreement of the Commission it was run in summer and autumn 2008. Of the 4000 sampled officials, more than 2000 answered the questions so that an exceptional response rate of 53% has been reached.

⁵ EUCIQ is an acronym for the ‘European Commission in Question’ project, which is funded by framework programme VI (through the EU-CONSENT Network of Excellence) and the UK Economic and Social Research Council. The principal investigator is Hussein Kassim of the University of East Anglia other investigators are John Peterson, Liesbet Hooghe, Renaud Dehousse, Michael W. Bauer and Andrew Thompson. See <http://www.uea.ac.uk/psi/research/EUCIQ>.

⁶ For example, in all DGs it was made sure that in all layers of the hierarchy enough women were in the sample, enough officials from EU12 etc. Those generally underrepresented “sub-groups” were sampled 3-1 with respect to the number among EU15 officials. The eventual responses have then been “weighted back” to display the true characteristics of the Commission population as a whole.

Dependent Variable

The basis of the dependent variable is a battery of questions of the EUCIQ survey about the individuals' assessment of the impact of recent administrative change in the Commission. The general question was "We would like to ask your views on recent administrative reforms. Thinking of the administrative reforms implemented since 2000, what are your views on the following statements?" The stimuli conceived for fleshing out this general question were, for example, "I have become more efficient in my day-to-day work", "My unit/service has become more efficient", "Resources are better matched to policy priorities", "The new tools and rules lead to more red-tape and increase the administrative load", or "Personnel management has become leaner and more focused". Officials could tack a range of responses from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree".

With the help of a factor analysis the dependent variable is constructed out of these seven questions that all probe (alongside various aspects) into the assessment of the recent administrative reform. The factor analysis shows that all seven variables load to one factor. Their values can thus be extracted and interpreted as a single dependent variable indicating the general attitude to the administrative reform. This data constitutes the dependent variable in the subsequent regression analysis.⁷

Control: The Melancholy Thesis

⁷ For details of the construction of the dependent variable and also the factor analysis see the annex.

According to the logic of the ideology argument supranationalists and intergovernmentalists are supposed to have a systematically different assessment of the Kinnock reform, because the reform is seen to weaken the Commission as an “administration de mission”, and for supranationalists this is harder to accept than for intergovernmentalists. There may be though a simpler argument—which however cuts across the theoretical conception of opportunity, learning and ideology. There may be individuals with the diffuse feeling that the Commission has lost political clout in recent years, and they may see the Kinnock reform as just another push on the Commission’s way down. I call this the melancholy hypothesis. That such melancholy is tangible everybody knows who led intensive face-to-face interviews with Commission staff about recent management change. Moreover, there are many Commission staff who actually link the Kinnock reform with the Commission’s loss of “political duties”, “political priorities”, “political function” and of its “original mission”.

I suggest testing this hypothesis by looking for a correlation of those who entered the European Commission because of idealism for European integration and the acceptance of the Kinnock reform. Obviously EU idealists should rather dislike it (EU idealism). And also those who think that the Commission recently lost influence in the EU system (to the European Parliament or to the member states) should also display a low acceptance of the administrative reform.

Thus ordered into three competing explanatory programmes and the melancholy thesis, I will now present the empirical results. The details of the operationalization and coding can be found in the annex. The vast majority of the needed information is taken from the EUCIQ survey. Note that I removed all individuals that entered the Commission after 2004 from the sample as they would not be able to compare

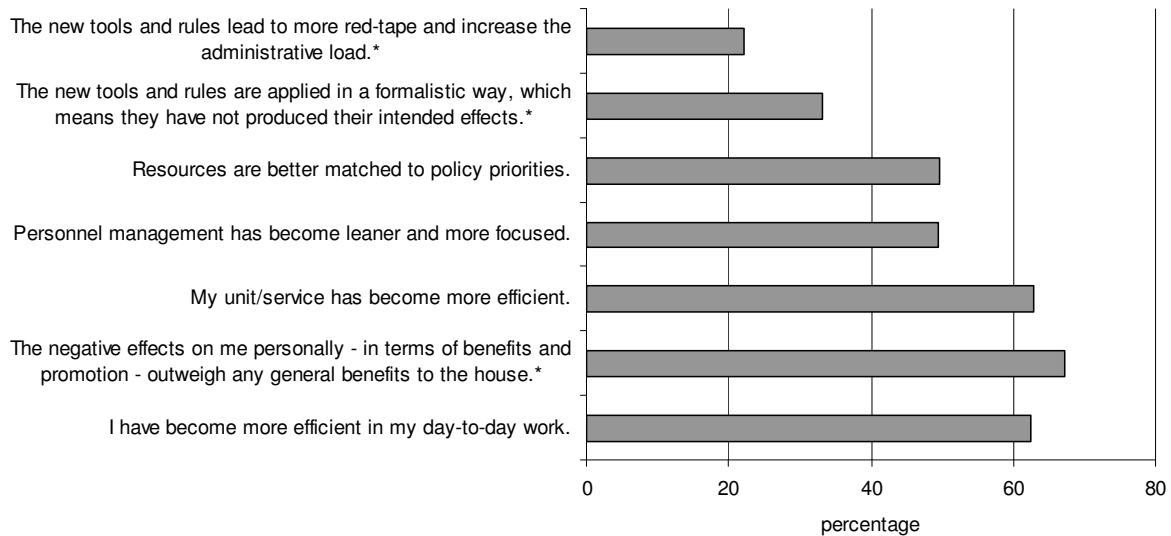
effects of the Kinnock reform to the time before.⁸ Additionally I used Eurobarometer data as well as information from the pertinent comparative public sector reform literature in order to fill some gaps (like create groups of NPM-forerunners and -laggards).

5. Empirical Analysis

Let us start with a look at the dependent variable, i.e. some descriptive statistics about the effects of administrative reform. The table below indicates the percentage of individuals in the sample who endorse recent organizational change or, at least, remain neutral in their assessment, i.e. by giving a neither-or-answer. One sees that there are features of the reform that obviously are seen very critically. About 70% of our interviewees agree, for example, that “the new tools and rules lead to more red-tape”. Other statements like, for example “my unit/service has become more efficient” or “I have become more efficient in my day-to-day work”, are however assessed quite positively. Around 65% of the interviewees agree with or remain neutral to these statements. One may argue about what it means if somebody displays in his answer “neutrality” to such a statement. Is it not—from the perspective of reform zealots—actually a failure if officials remain lukewarm to essential features of the administrative reform? Whatever our assessment of “neutrality” in this context is, we have to recognize that there are large fractions of staff that by now embrace the Kinnock reform and come to a differential and often quite positive assessment.

⁸ That is to say that there are no individuals from the countries that recently joined the EU in the sample. However, running the same regression models including EU12 shows that they are actually much more positive in their assessment of the Kinnock reform than individuals from the EU15. Since the EU12 however cannot possibly assess the status-quo-ante, i.e. whether things have become “more efficient” etc., they had to be removed from the sample. Consequentially, the sample consists of 1008 Commission officials and their attitudes towards the administrative reform. For reasons of missing values in respect to single items of the dependent variable we retain 707 interviewees and their general reform acceptance.

Table 1: Acceptance of Kinnock Reform in Percent⁹



Note: The percentage of “acceptance” displays respondents that indicated a positive attitude and neutral attitude towards the administrative reform. The original answer scale ranges from strongly agree (= 4) to strongly disagree (= 0). * Please note that the answers of these statements had been re-coded in order to ensure that high numerical values indicate a positive attitude towards the administrative reform.

Let us come now to a simple statistical analysis (OLS regressions). It produces a relatively clear picture. The opportunity variables do well and as expected; senior manager, for example, do approve of the reform even more than middle manager compared to normal staff—which indicates the robustness of the argument the higher in the hierarchy, the greater the enthusiasm for the Kinnock reform. There is also a clear confirmation that those who see their career perspectives endangered, tend to dislike the Kinnock reform. Learning and ideology variables however do badly; there is only one significant regression coefficient (administrative traditions) but the relationship goes in the opposite direction than theoretically expected, i.e. individuals from laggard countries actually seem to like the Kinnock reform *better* than individuals from NPM-forerunner countries. The variables of the melancholy hypothesis do also badly. Individuals who see a loss of power of the Commission towards the member states do indeed significantly dislike the Kinnock reform, those

⁹ A version of this table with more detailed information is in the annex.

however who see such a loss of power of the Commission with view to the European Parliament, do not dislike the reform. In other words, we do not observe a clear pattern.

Table 2: Regression models: Acceptance of Administrative Reform

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Opportunity</i>			
Middle Manager	0.147*	0.171**	0.166**
	(0.081)	(0.081)	(0.081)
Senior Manager	0.392***	0.423***	0.422***
	(0.140)	(0.137)	(0.137)
Career Perspective	-0.340***	-0.351***	-0.358***
	(0.042)	(0.041)	(0.041)
<i>Learning</i>			
Administrative Traditions	-0.208**	-0.190**	-0.188**
	(0.084)	(0.082)	(0.082)
Work Experience in Private Sector	-0.085		
	(0.077)		
Economists	0.218**	0.200**	0.206**
	(0.108)	(0.096)	(0.096)
<i>Ideology</i>			
Supranationalism	0.038		
	(0.042)		
Entrepreneur	0.023		
	(0.032)		
<i>Melancholy</i>			
EU Idealism	0.062		
	(0.083)		
Loss of Power for the Commission 1	-0.089*	-0.078	
	(0.050)	(0.049)	
Loss of Power for the Commission 2	-0.133***	-0.124***	-0.159***
	(0.044)	(0.042)	(0.039)
<i>Control</i>			
Time of Service	-0.016**	-0.017**	-0.017**
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Lawyers	0.038		
	(0.087)		
Age	-0.011*	-0.012*	-0.013*
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Female	-0.093		
	(0.093)		
Constant	2.259***	2.442***	2.355***
	(0.369)	(0.331)	(0.328)
Observations	551	561	564
R-squared ¹⁰	0.23	0.23	0.23

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

¹⁰ R-squared remains low across all models—0,23—but this is well in the range of what can usually be expected from this kind of survey data. R-squared adjusted cannot be produced because the data is already „weighted“.

In sum, an individual's position in the hierarchy and his expectation of fair treatment in view of professional career management are the strongest predictors for acceptance of the management reform.

The explanatory program "learning" displays only one very strong explanatory variable: national administrative traditions. However, the regression coefficient goes into the wrong theoretical direction, i.e. individuals from NPM-laggard countries actually are more positive about the Kinnock reform than those from countries who apply NPM more comprehensively. Private sector experience or training as economist appears also without any influence.

Neither is EU ideology a convincing explanatory program—and this is actually an astonishing result that is in stark contradiction with many popular explanations of the differential assessment of the Kinnock reform. Neither supranationalists nor entrepreneurs do oppose the reform as they are theoretically expected to.

Finally, the melancholy hypothesis appears also to be disconfirmed. EU idealists appear not to have a problem with the Kinnock reform; and the correlation between those who see the Commission losing power remains ambiguous.

In sum, the refinement of our explanatory programs puts the relationship between hierarchical position and fear of reform impact on the own career development centre stage. The opportunity explanation does clearly carry most explanatory leverage.

6. Conclusion: Getting Used to Kinnock

The main question of this paper was how staff relates to recent organizational change within the European Commission. Usually rational or sociological hypotheses are put forward in an ad-hoc manner to explain the acceptance of administrative reforms within the Commission. Little solid empirical—let alone statistical—knowledge has so far been available. To deduce hypotheses systematically from theoretical approaches and to put them to an empirical test was therefore the main aim of this paper.

One may criticize the quality of the data and the way the three explanatory programs—opportunity, learning and EU ideology—have been constructed and probably many other features of the presented data and arguments. Is the quality of the operationalization of each of the conceptualised variables really comparable? Is the theoretical “anchoring” of the respective programs in general theories of popular attitudes research really justifiable since Commission officials are a highly qualified administrative elite? Are the three programs truly theoretical competitors on an equal footing at all? Tackling such questions is not easy.

At any rate, taken at face value it appears quite interesting that only the opportunity, i.e. the refinement of the utility maximization approach, displays clear and robust relationships. The general theoretical discussion about conceptualizing and explaining elite beliefs does obviously not end here. Yet it appears to me that refining the various programs and looking for approaches at a “meso” level which combines purely “economic” and “social” explanations is the way ahead. From the analysis I interpret that if a stimulus—like the Kinnock reform—may have direct and concrete implications for the working life of individuals, it may dominate various other relationships. In this respect the results of the paper clarify “under which conditions”

one should expect economic considerations to prevail over other sources of preference formation.

Turning to the results as such, what we observe in the data is probably as interesting as what we do not see.

For example, the acceptance of reform appears *not* to be driven by ideology. Variables that attempt to relate patterns of acceptance or opposition to recent managerial reform inside the Commission with individual ideological beliefs about the advantage of supranationalism, or the need for an entrepreneurial Commission, do fairly badly. Also the ad-hoc proxy “melancholy” does not unfold convincing explanatory power.

By contrast, officials in the Commission appear not at all change-averse in view of new challenges at the work place. In general the acceptance levels of the Kinnock reform as measured by the employed dependent variable are quite high. Neutral or positive attitudes towards organizational change disappear however when the own career advancement is endangered. Where career perspectives darken, opposition to organizational change rises.

Thus one important insight the current study provides is that the Commission officials, however grudgingly, have accepted by and large the reached state of the art in terms of management culture inside their organization. It is thus time to “de-dramatize” the Kinnock reforms and acknowledge that a kind of managerial normalization has taken place. Somehow staff appears to have got used to the reform, routines seem to have emerged how to handle its paradoxes and

pathologies. Commission officials are an international bureaucratic elite and an immensely professional class of public servants. Provided administrative modernization does not tinker with their prospects for a fair career, they embrace, or at least, do not oppose for very long, even dramatic organizational change. Internal management may not run always smoothly and many officials may doubt the superior logic and practical consistency of many of the recent administrative changes. However, the relationship between the individual official and the Kinnock reform appears to be best qualified by what one often hears when visiting Brussels: on s'arrange.

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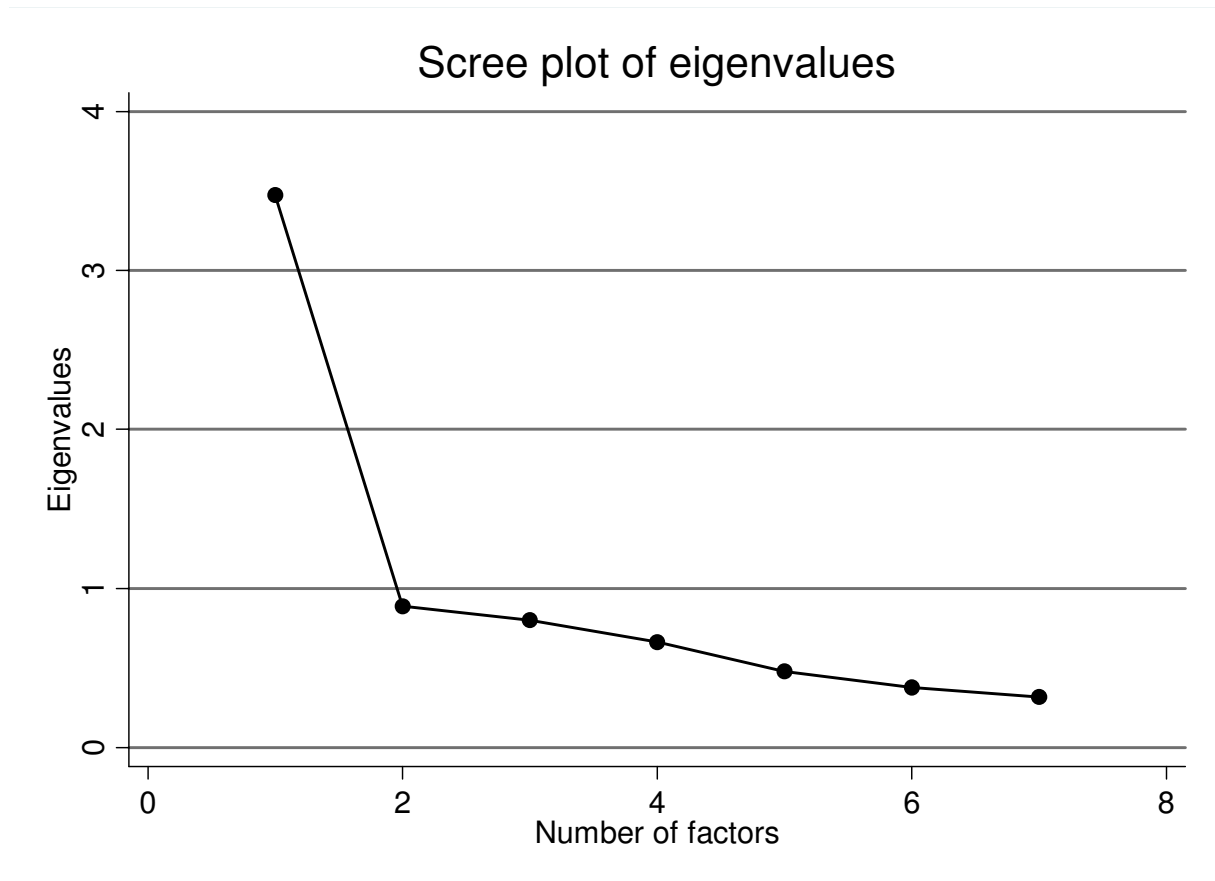
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Annex

1. Dependent Variable

Question: We would like to ask your views on recent administrative reforms.

Thinking of the administrative reforms implemented since 2000, what are your views on the following statements?	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
1) I have become more efficient in my day-to-day work						
2) The negative effects on me personally – in terms of benefits and promotion – outweigh any general benefits to the house						

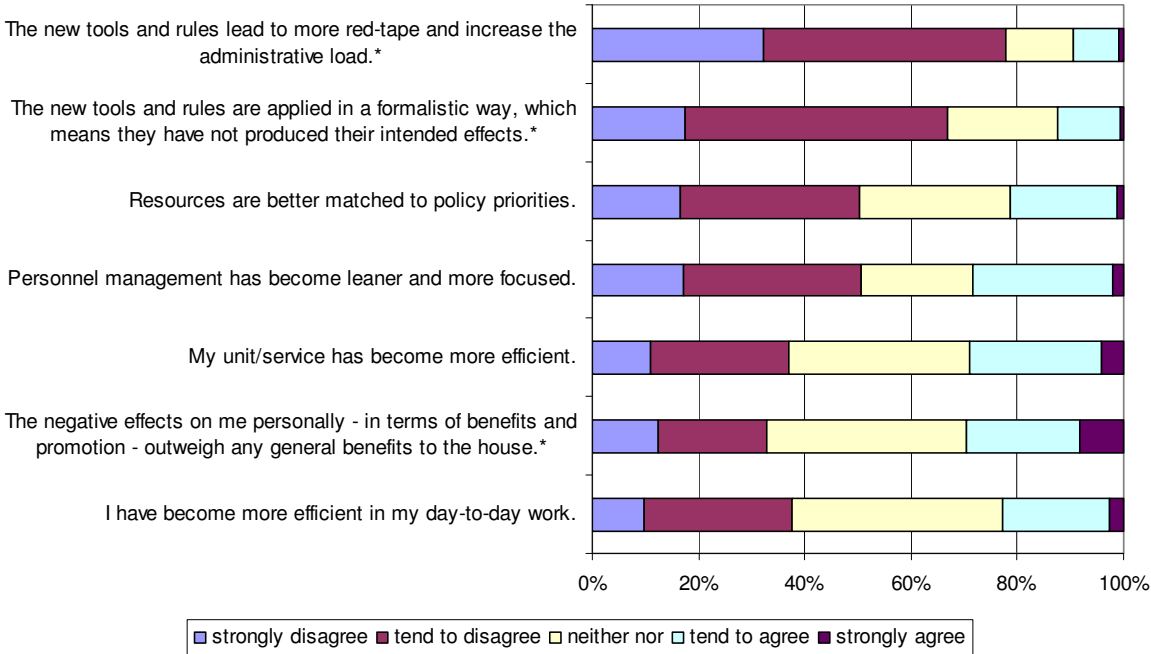


4. Independent Variables: Coding

Approach	Variable	Hypothesis	Data Source	Coding
Opportunity hypotheses	Middle Manager	The higher in rank, the higher reform acceptance	EUCIQ 20: What is your current position?	1=middle manager, 0=other
	Senior Manager	The higher in rank, the higher reform acceptance	EUCIQ 20: What is your current position?	1=senior manager, 0=other
	Career Perspective	If there is the perception, career management inside the Commission has been recently unfair, then low reform acceptance	EUCIQ 160: The consequences of enlargement for career development have been handled with equity and fairness.	0=very fair, 1=somewhat fair, 2=neither nor, 3=somewhat unfair, 4=very unfair
Learning hypotheses	Administrative Traditions	Individuals from NPM forerunner countries like the reform, those from NPM laggards dislike the reform	Cluster: UK, Scandinavia, East I = NPM forerunner, EU South (GR, F, ES,) East II = NPM laggards (according to Pollitt/Bouckaert 2004)	1=laggards, 0=NPM forerunners
	Experience in private Sector	Work experience in private sector should lead to higher reform acceptance	EUCIQ 10: Work experience outside the Commission	1=yes, 0=no
	Economists	Education in economics should lead to higher reform acceptance	EUCIQ 7: Education – Subject of main degree	1=Economics, 0=other subjects
Ideology hypotheses	Supranationalism	Supranationalists should display lower reform acceptance	EUCIQ 128: Some argue that member states—not the Commission or European Parliament—should be the central players in the European	0=agree intergovernmentalist, 1=somewhat intergovernmentalist, 2=neither nor, 3=somewhat

			Union. What is your position?	supranationalist, 4=strong supranationalist
	Entrepreneur	Those who see tasks of the Commission in entrepreneurship for integration should display low reform acceptance	EUCIQ 132: The more member states the EU has, the more important is the Commission's role as policy initiator	0=disagree entrepreneur, 1=sw disagree entrepreneur, 2=neither nor, 3=sw entrepreneur, 4=strong agree entrepreneur
Melancholy theses	EU Idealism	EU idealists should display low reform acceptance	EUCIQ 2_4 reasons for joining the European Commission	1= Commitment to Europe, 0=other reason
	Com Power Loss 1	Those who see the Commission as political loser should display low reform acceptance	EUCIQ 224: The Commission is more powerful today than ever before	0=agree, 1=agree somewhat, 2=neither, nor 3=disagree somewhat, 4=disagree
	Com Power Loss 2	Those who see the Commission as political loser should display low reform acceptance	EUCIQ 226: The Commission is losing power to the European Parliament*	0=agree, 1=agree somewhat, 2=neither, nor 3=disagree somewhat, 4=disagree
Control	Lawyers	Education in Law, political science and engineers should lead to lower reform acceptance	EUCIQ 7: Education – Subject of main degree	1=Law, Politics or Engineering, 0=other subjects
	Time of Service	The longer time of service, the lower reform acceptance	EUCIQ 4: Entrance time to the Commission	Years of Service
	Age		EUCIQ 123: What is your year of birth?	Years
	Female		EUCIQ 124: What is your gender?	1=female, 0=male

5. More Details to Table 1



Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	N
I have become more efficient in my day-to-day work.	1.8	.96	0	4	845
The negative effects on me personally – in terms of benefits and promotion – outweigh any general benefits to the house.*	1.9	1.1	0	4	772
My unit/service has become more efficient.	1.9	1	0	4	814
Personnel management has become leaner and more focused.	1.6	1.1	0	4	836
Resources are better matched to policy priorities.	1.6	1	0	4	829
The new tools and rules are applied in a formalistic way, which means they have not produced their intended effects.*	1.3	.91	0	4	832
The new tools and rules lead to more red-tape and increase the administrative load.*	1	.93	0	4	849

Note: The answer scale ranges from strongly agree (= 4) to strongly disagree (= 0). * Please note that the answers of these statements have been re-coded in order to ensure that high values indicate a positive attitude towards the administrative reform; N = number of respondents.

6. More regression results

a) Comparison of regression results for middle and senior managers

The following table gives an overview of additional regression analysis. On the left hand we list the results for OLS-regressions of middle managers. On the right hand those for senior managers are reported.

In sum, the above findings are reflected in the sub-sample analysis. Exceptionally, “Supranationalism” is insignificant in the regression model for the middle managers. For senior managers this ideological variable is significant on a lower level. Overall our explanatory model can explain more variance within the senior manager sub-sample. The R-squared in the senior manager models is clearly higher than in the models for the middle managers. However, due to the sample structure we have to recognize the different observation numbers in the sub-samples. Concerning the single explanatory variables we see our findings above confirmed. Especially the two explanatory variables “career perspective” and “loss of power for the Commission 2” show highly significant regression coefficients which have the theoretically expected sign.

	Middle Manager		Senior Manager	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
<i>Opportunity</i>				
Career Perspective	-0.237*** (0.065)	-0.249*** (0.062)	-0.378*** (0.123)	-0.463*** (0.107)
<i>Learning</i>				
Administrative Traditions	-0.179		-0.365	

Work Experience in Private Sector	(0.132) -0.150 (0.115)		(0.252) 0.023 (0.248)	
Economists	0.214 (0.165)		-0.021 (0.366)	
<i>Ideology</i>				
Supranationalism	0.034 (0.067)		0.269** (0.134)	0.172* (0.100)
Entrepreneur	0.019 (0.049)		0.038 (0.113)	
<i>Melancholy</i>				
EU Idealism	-0.007 (0.118)		-0.237 (0.344)	
Loss of Power for the Commission 1	-0.042 (0.089)		-0.130 (0.153)	
Loss of Power for the Commission 2	-0.172** (0.072)	-0.197*** (0.061)	-0.290** (0.124)	-0.354*** (0.089)
<i>Control</i>				
Lawyers	0.030 (0.133)		0.147 (0.320)	
Time of Service	-0.011 (0.012)		0.014 (0.022)	
Age	-0.014 (0.010)	-0.022*** (0.008)	-0.025 (0.028)	-0.007 (0.019)
Female	-0.042 (0.144)		-0.196 (0.328)	
Constant	2.219*** (0.559)	2.372*** (0.477)	2.825** (1.163)	2.112* (1.135)
Observations	241	255	72	72
R-squared	0.16	0.14	0.33	0.29

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

b) Regression results for acceptance of reform instruments¹¹

The reform of the European Commission introduced different instruments which (should) contribute to good governance within the supranational institutions. In the following table we scrutinize the acceptance of 13 instruments among our commission officials. These dependent variables are binary coded (i.e. improved versus not improved the capacity to do the job). Therefore the tables show the results of logistic regression models. Reported are those variables which had been significant in the full model. Obviously no variable, which had been significant in the above models, seems to have influence in all of the 13 models for the NPM-instruments. However, the utility variable “career perspective” is significant in nine regression models and “senior manager” in seven. Although “administrative traditions” had a middle level of significance in the analysis of the general reform

¹¹ As information on these items is only available for middle and senior managers, we use the former one as reference category in the regression analysis.

acceptance the variable seems to be less influential in regard to the NPM-instruments. Here, we find evidence for one influential relationship between this variable of the learning approach and the dependent variable “evaluation and monitoring of achievements”. However, the negative regression coefficient implies the theoretically expected direction. NPM laggards are more reluctant to the evaluation instrument than commission officials from NPM leader countries. The regression results depict a similar picture for the melancholy variable “loss of power 2”. With the exception of the “Annual activity report” regression the explanatory variable remains insignificant in all other models.

	Detailed job description	Annual appraisal exercise	Deciding staff requirements	Promotion	Training opportunities
<i>Opportunity</i>					
Senior Manager				0.787*	
				(0.471)	
Career Perspective	-0.356***	-0.426***	-0.361***	-0.612**	
	(0.112)	(0.118)	(0.126)	(0.237)	
<i>Learning</i>					
Administrative Traditions					
Work Experience in Private Sector					
Economists			0.405		
			(0.277)		
<i>Ideology</i>					
Supranationalism					
Entrepreneur		0.282***			
		(0.094)			
<i>Melancholy</i>					
EU Idealism					0.600**
					(0.248)
Loss of Power for the Commission 1					-0.168
					(0.119)
Loss of Power for the Commission 2					
<i>Control</i>					
Time of Service		0.044*			
		(0.024)			
Lawyers					
Age		-0.056**			
		(0.024)			
Female		-0.636**			
		(0.303)			
Constant	0.096	1.850	-0.557*	-1.726***	0.123
	(0.293)	(1.127)	(0.334)	(0.580)	(0.418)
Observations	391	373	388	391	404

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

	Drafting annual activity statement	Preparing annual strategy decision	Drafting DG annual management plan	Evaluation
<i>Opportunity</i>				
Senior Manager	1.022*** (0.325)	0.896*** (0.310)		
Career Perspective	-0.509*** (0.160)	-0.344** (0.143)	-0.270** (0.113)	
<i>Learning</i>				
Administrative Traditions				-0.609** (0.277)
Work Experience in Private Sector			0.487** (0.226)	
Economists				
<i>Ideology</i>				
Supranationalism				
Entrepreneur		0.213* (0.125)	0.252*** (0.092)	
<i>Melancholy</i>				
EU Idealism				
Loss of Power for the Commission 1		-0.412*** (0.145)		
Loss of Power for the Commission 2				
<i>Control</i>				
Time of Service			0.043** (0.018)	
Lawyers				
Age				0.095*** (0.022)
Female				
Constant	-1.075*** (0.404)	-0.309 (0.713)	-1.827*** (0.608)	-6.048*** (1.216)
Observations	391	381	383	395

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

	Annual activity report	Abolition of ex ante visa	Creation of financial circuits	New audit system
<i>Opportunity</i>				
Senior Manager	1.200*** (0.281)	0.916*** (0.269)	0.472* (0.258)	0.847** (0.331)
Career Perspective	-0.376*** (0.140)			-0.436*** (0.165)
<i>Learning</i>				
Administrative Traditions				
Work Experience in Private Sector				

Economists				
	<i>Ideology</i>			
Supranationalism				
Entrepreneur				
	<i>Melancholy</i>			
EU Idealism		0.220		
		(0.283)		
Loss of Power for the Commission 1				
Loss of Power for the Commission 2	-0.301**			
	(0.145)			
	<i>Control</i>			
Time of Service		-0.020		
		(0.017)		
Lawyers				
Age				
Female				
Constant	0.036	-0.836*	-0.918***	-1.246***
	(0.513)	(0.427)	(0.123)	(0.418)
Observations	386	408	408	391

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.