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Acceptance of Administrative Change in the European Commission

Abstract: This paper explores the question as to how officials of the European Commission relate to the recent modernisation of management within their institution (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 against EUCIQ survey data by applying a simple regression model. There is evidence that Commission officials – unless they fear negative career effects – view the administrative reform quite positively (the higher their position in the organisational hierarchy, the greater their acceptance). With respect to the recent organisational changes, the Commission appears to have entered a phase of normalisation.

Keywords: organizational change, European Commission, administrative elites, change-oriented behaviour, international civil servants

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1. Introduction¹

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the European Commission resisted the new public management wave then affecting virtually all member states of the European Union (Pollitt/Bouckaert 2004). Perhaps as a result of such prolonged resistance to administrative modernisation, the catching-up process undergone by the Commission in the 2000s has been more intense and probably more painful than in many other national public administrations (Balint et al. 2008; Ellinas/Suleiman 2008; Kassim 2008).

In a previous study that explored the views of the heads of unit of the European Commission (Bauer 2008, 2009b), I found that only a small fraction of middle managers welcomed the recent administrative modernisation; another group expressed a position along more neutral lines, such as “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 turned out to be unambiguous opponents of the Kinnock reform. They summed up the “Kinnock reform in one word: bureaucracy”. One of the more friendly comments in this category was that “many heads of unit feel they have to carry the heavy burden of bureaucratic, ineffective procedures that were introduced.” Others used sharper tones: “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 spoke of a “control mania” within the Commission

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that “creates a culture of fear”; “control should be on a reasonable level: now it has gone mad”. Many statements reflected the fear that the Commission was losing its “political duties”, “political priorities” and “political function” and that the “original mission is forgotten”. The “real problem is that process has become an aim in itself”; heads of unit spoke of “lots of words, declarations, announcements which lead to nowhere, there is no increase in productivity”.²

Obviously, it is a challenge to any organisation if a majority of staff consistently and continuously opposes organisational change that the leadership believes is crucial. Such opposition always carries the danger of paralysation. The fact that in the case of the European Commission paralysation appears to not be just a lofty hypothesis but a real risk is underpinned by the assessments by managerial staff cited above. Nonetheless, the previous study was based on little more than 100 interviews, all with individuals 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, some years later, judgements about the Kinnock reform are still as negative as they appeared to be in 2006. The general question of this article, then, is how are the Commission officials coping with the shock of the Kinnock modernisation today? More specifically, how can one explain staff acceptance *of* or opposition *to* recent management modernisation within the European Commission?

This paper proceeds as follows. Following the introduction, the Kinnock reform will be briefly described (Section 2). I will then discuss theoretical approaches that promise analytical leverage with respect to my research question, i.e. why some officials endorse particular managerial changes more and others less (Section 3). Section 4

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

starts by outlining the survey from which the data is taken and then describes the research design I applied. The regression analysis and its discussion follow in Section 5. The paper concludes by placing the results in a broader theoretical and empirical perspective (Section 6). The central empirical insight is that the reception of the recent administrative changes by the staff of the European Commission now appears to be much less negative than most of the literature thus far acknowledges. The Commission officials seem to have got used to the administrative changes that were recently implemented. It therefore seems time to “de-dramatise” the Kinnock reform – to acknowledge that some kind of normalisation has taken place and that new, broadly accepted routines have emerged.

2. Bringing Dramatic Change: The Kinnock Reform

The history of management change in the Commission appears to be mainly one of missed opportunities. The problems have been known roughly since the late 1970s (Spierenburg report), but only under the presidency of Jacques Santer did reform efforts intensify. Implementation dramatically failed, however, in the context of the row with the European Parliament concerning discharge from liability for the 1997 budget. 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 consisted of four crucial issues (personnel, strategic planning and programming, financial management, and transparency and ethics). The major changes were implemented between 2000 and 2004, but during the period

2004 to 2009, the Commission was still busy coping 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 having changed the Commission from a continental-style, late Weberian bureaucracy into an administration model à la new public management (Balint et al. 2008). Some kind of managerial change was certainly overdue given that the Commission – despite task expansion and changing duties – had practically stood still with respect to internal management for the previous 40 years (Metcalfe 1992; but see Bauer 2007; Bauer/Heisserer 2010). Given the intensity of the internal changes, it seems no exaggeration to dub the reform an “historic” departure (Kassim 2004a).

In effect, the Kinnock reform brought an increase in internal horizontal and vertical coordination and control mechanisms with the aim of optimising 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) approach to organisation with strategic priority setting (on the basis of updated information about what exactly is done in the Commission and by whom), corresponding resource allocation, process monitoring, evaluation and – inherently related to these – redistribution of financial and personnel resources on the basis of this programming cycle. It should be noted that activity-based cost management (Cokins 1996) is still output- rather than outcome-focused. Nonetheless, it is still a far

cry from the rather non-transparent input steering that the Commission pursued 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” (European 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 and sets 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 according reporting notes, evaluating and communicating decisions back to the units and to staff together 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 modernisation blueprint, given that budgeting, programming and coordination aspects have personnel implications and vice versa. The linearisation of careers, i.e. fewer obstacles 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 modernisation, the Commission has been changed from input- to output-style management. The top management is 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 potentially intervene with greater precision and effect.

Space considerations prevent me from describing the Kinnock reform in more detail here, but it should have become clear that the recent managerial change in the Commission was comprehensive and controversial and affected in a practical sense all the individuals working in the institution. A change of this magnitude is unlikely to leave these public servants indifferent, given that they have to cope with the impact of change extensively in their day-to-day working lives. Thus, the crucial question is which theoretical approaches will allow us to derive systematic expectations about individual attitudes towards organisational change.

3. Explaining Elite Preferences

To produce positive results, organisational change requires 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 as to how and why staff oppose or endorse organisational change is thus of great practical and theoretical importance. The Kinnock reform without doubt represented 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 theorise the potential relationship between individual Commission staff and organisational change? Which theoretical approaches allow us to derive systematic expectations about individual attitudes towards organisational change?

There is a rich tradition of studying what can be summarised as the belief systems of political elites. While international civil servants have not received much attention in research to date, national administrators, government leaders, party leaders and European parliamentarians have been studied (Converse 1964; Derlien 1996; Lau/Sears 1986; Hix 2002). In the case of public officials, who are at 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 backgrounds, education, career paths and political attitudes (Aberbach et al. 1981; Aberbach/Rockman 2006).

The interest in this kind of research rests on the assumption that individual attitudes or dispositions are reflected – once they have been developed – in the individual’s actions (Putnam 1976). But this assumption, and also what its implications might be

when a large number of individuals form an organisation, is not shared by everybody. Some researchers 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 how the humans in it behave, while individuals trained, say, as political scientists might base their proposals on other propositions, so that organisations such as 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 researchers who are sceptical about the insights that 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 the attitudes of members of a hierarchically structured organisation (like a 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 organisation, individual dispositions on lower levels of the hierarchy may not matter all that much.

Against this background, it is probably no surprise that up to now the question as to how opportunity structures, formative years, social backgrounds and the like shape the emergence of individual attitudes (attitudes as dependent variable) has been tackled more often and with greater success than the question as to what difference varying patterns of individual attitudes actually do make (attitudes as independent variable). But it is also obvious that it is only by reaching more solid ground with respect to the first question (what explains individual attitudes) that we stand a chance of making progress as regards the second (what different individual attitudes explain).

With respect to the question as to what explains the belief systems of political elites, there are two classical positions, one resting on economic theory and the mechanism of utility maximisation, the other on sociology and the mechanism of socialisation. Given their ontological origins, these two positions appear difficult to reconcile. Indeed, they have been set in sharp conflict, i.e. as theoretical competitors, in order to explain individual attitudes. Currently, however, research informed by political psychology and neurobiology, among other disciplines, 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 a view to the question of how individual administrators within the Commission relate to organisational change? In actual fact, researchers are currently taking both approaches: they are working on refining the classical positions (utility maximisation and socialisation), and at the same time they are looking for new ways to bridge the ontological gap between self-interest and social explanations in order to come to a more realistic understanding as to when and under which conditions human beings tend to follow the one logic or the other.

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

With respect to elite preferences concerning organisational change, which constitutes the empirical focus of this paper, the point is that the classical concepts of utility maximisation and socialisation indeed appear too abstract (almost like taking a sledgehammer to crack a nut!) to be useful for deriving meaningful hypotheses for empirical testing. Thus, we need refinement and if possible, some kind of innovation.

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

Opportunity

What I understand under the term “opportunity” is the core of “utility maximisation”. 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 easily) identifiable consequences for the individual. In our case, the implication of an organisational reform for the “wellbeing” of an individual should lie in the professional opportunity structure it creates, or, more precisely, it should be crucial whether organisational change is perceived as advantageous or disadvantageous for the job itself or for the career prospects of an individual.

It appears plausible that the Kinnock reform, as a new public management reform, produces and redistributes “professional” costs and benefits vertically. Put simply, the higher one’s position 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 upwards in order to serve as the basis for improved organisational 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 restructures the entire career advancement system, people who feel disadvantaged by the new ways of doing things are unlikely to have much sympathy for recent organisational change.

Opportunity hypotheses

Given that the administrative reform redistributes the costs and benefits of organisational change vertically and also affects individuals' career advancement, a first hypothesis thus focuses on hierarchical rank (middle manager and senior manager) and expects the following: the higher an individual stands vertically in the hierarchy, the greater his or her acceptance of the reform. A second hypothesis puts individuals' perception as to whether their individual career is helped or hindered by the reform at centre stage: those who are convinced that their own career advancement is negatively affected by administrative reform should demonstrate lower acceptance of the reform than those who see no such connection (career prospects).

Learning

Sociology and psychology view the formation of preferences as an endogenous process. The core assumption is that individuals develop preferences by internalising norms and values from 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 “socialisation”; but similar to the case of “opportunity”, socialisation conceptually spans a number of different phenomena. Socialisation is frequently equated with “group dynamic” effects, i.e. the way in which the norms and values of the in-group are adopted by a (new) individual; often the “intake” of norms is thought to work automatically, especially in the formative years (social class, particular university education, particular discipline, e.g., if an individual is trained as a economist, etc.). Recent research, rather than using the notion of socialisation, employs learning theory to account for the observation that there appear to be “active” and “passive”

ways that an individual may take on certain norms and values from his or her environment.

Applying this approach to our research question, one can argue, for example, that new public management reforms have come to be implemented first and most intensively in the UK and in northern Europe. Commission officials from these countries may thus have had the opportunity to become familiar with crucial elements of this type of organisational change and thus accept it more serenely than officials who come from an “NPM laggard” country. The point here is that any kind of organisational change usually meets with resistance from staff; “people” at the aggregate level always demonstrate a certain degree of 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 the organisational change in question. 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 to the sphere of public administration. Accordingly, one should find that those officials with experience in the private sector are more in favour of the reform than those who have never worked outside the 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 thus focuses on the relationship between national administrative traditions and individual reform attitudes. As the modernisation of national public sectors has

been pursued more intensively in some countries than in others, individuals from those countries that have embraced NPM reforms are also likely to endorse the Kinnock reform; 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 heighten reform enthusiasm. Kinnock is an 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 maximisation and learning need a kind of direct intellectual or practical exposure to a stimulus; an individual is then expected to be able to take a position on the basis of this “direct link”. What happens, however, in the absence of such direct calculative or educative links? Is the individual then doomed to having no position at all, or, as in the case of learning in our example above, should we expect an individual without direct linkage to always automatically resist any kind of change on the basis of unfamiliarity? What else could have a systematic influence on an individual’s position with respect to some kind of change? I believe “intermediate” factors, as they have been identified in research on mass attitudes, could be this missing (indirect) link. The argument in this case is that individuals (who have no direct individual exposure and no means or desire to invest in establishing one) turn

to “proxies”, “cues” or “heuristics” – often in form of ideologies – in order to position themselves with respect to new features in 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 or her conviction on a continuum between market liberalism and social interventionism. Against 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 had spent working for the Commission, i.e. whether a kind of socialisation towards “supranationalism” takes place among individuals working in the Commission (Hooghe 2001). Her answer is “rather not” (Hooghe 2001, 2005). In my view, Hooghe has thus produced evidence that the crucial question about the *finalité* of the European Union is usually answered on the basis of relatively stable ideological dispositions that the officials “bring with them” and that “stay with them” throughout their careers.

The implication of this point for my research question is important. There may be some kind of self-selection when Commission personnel are recruited (Europhile Commission officials recruit other Europhile Commission officials). However, there is only weak evidence that officials *change* their views on the European Union as a *result of* their working within the European Commission.⁴ Put bluntly, officials appear to stick to their convictions with regard to their personal preferred governance order

⁴ Hooghe’s truncated sample, the lack of panel data, the confounding influence of other factors, etc. make it very hard to prove the presence or absence of socialisation in any definitive way. In her 2005 article, Hooghe highlights another factor: the rapidly changing political and organisational environment – institutions in flux are never fertile ground for socialisation since the cues they provide are in flux as well (I am grateful to Liesbet for pointing this out to me).

for the European Union regardless of the fact that they are actually employed by an institution that obviously has a particular organisational 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 of 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 interviews with Commission officials about the recent administrative modernisation (see the evidence presented in the Introduction above), the dominant narrative is that the Commission has been purposely weakened by the Kinnock reform (Bauer 2008). Supranationalists mourn the era of Jacques Delors and the then pro-active Commission and equate 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-bureaucratisation that seeks to paralyse the Commission and distract staff from engaging in integrationist projects.

Ideology hypotheses

Officials within the Commission – here I refer only to “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. Against this background, the ideology hypothesis expects that individuals who lean towards supranationalism as their model for the future European political order will exhibit rather low acceptance of the recent administrative changes within the Commission. Because the supranational logic of integration favours strong European institutions, and because 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 this argument, one may also imagine that those officials who see the mission of the Commission in furthering European unification with the help of integrationist projects (basically old-school neo-functionalists) will show little support for the recent administrative changes (entrepreneurs).

4. Research Design

Thus, three sets of hypotheses (opportunity, learning, and ideology) have been identified that characterise competing expectations about the relationship between Commission officials and their acceptance of recent administrative change. Before proceeding with their analysis, however, I will first describe the data source and the specification of the dependent variable.

The data stem from the EUCIQ survey. The EUCIQ team is dedicated to studying the European Commission as an organisation in the governance context of the European Union of today. The team has developed a questionnaire of about 30 “closed”

questions (with a considerable number of sub-questions) on several important topics such as inter-institutional relationships, internal horizontal and vertical coordination, effects of enlargement, and also the recent administrative reforms within the European Commission. The sample of 4,000 Commission officials was carefully constructed as a disproportionate stratified random sample.⁵ The survey was conducted as an online enquiry 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 4,000 sampled officials, more than 2,000 responded to the questions, so that an exceptional response rate of 53% was attained.

Dependent Variable

The basis of the dependent variable is a battery of questions in the EUCIQ survey concerning individuals' assessment of the impact of recent administrative change within 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", and "Personnel management has become leaner and more focused". Officials could choose from a different responses ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree".

⁵ For example, in all DGs it was ensured that for all layers of the hierarchy the sample contained enough women, enough officials from EU12, etc. These generally underrepresented "sub-groups" were sampled 3-1 with respect to their number among EU15 officials. The eventual responses were then "weighted back" to display the true characteristics of the Commission population as a whole.

With the help of factor analysis, the dependent variable is constructed out of these seven questions, which all explore (in addition to various other aspects) 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. These data constitute the dependent variable in the subsequent regression analysis.⁶

Control: The Melancholy Thesis

According to the logic of the ideology argument, supranationalists and intergovernmentalists would be expected 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 this for supranationalists is harder to accept than for intergovernmentalists. There may, however, be a simpler argument, even though it would cut 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 these may see the Kinnock reform as just another enforced step on the Commission’s way down. I call this the melancholy hypothesis. Anybody who has carried out intensive face-to-face interviews with Commission staff about recent management change knows that there is a tangible sense of melancholy among them. Moreover, there are many Commission staff who actually see a link between the Kinnock reform and the

⁶ For details of the construction of the dependent variable and of the factor analysis, see the Appendix.

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 between those who entered the European Commission on the basis of their idealism regarding European integration and the acceptance of the Kinnock reform. Obviously, EU idealists should rather dislike the reform (EU idealism). Likewise, those who think that the Commission has recently lost influence in the EU system (to the European Parliament or to the member states) should also exhibit a low degree of acceptance with respect to the administrative reform.

Having thus ordered the hypotheses into three competing explanatory programmes plus the melancholy thesis, I will now present the empirical results. The details of the operationalisation and coding can be found in the appendix. The vast majority of the information required is taken from the EUCIQ survey. Note that I removed all individuals who entered the Commission after 2004 from the sample as they would not be able to compare the effects of the Kinnock reform with the preceding period.⁷ I additionally used Eurobarometer data as well as information from the pertinent comparative public sector reform literature in order to fill in some gaps (e.g., to create groups of NPM forerunners and laggards).

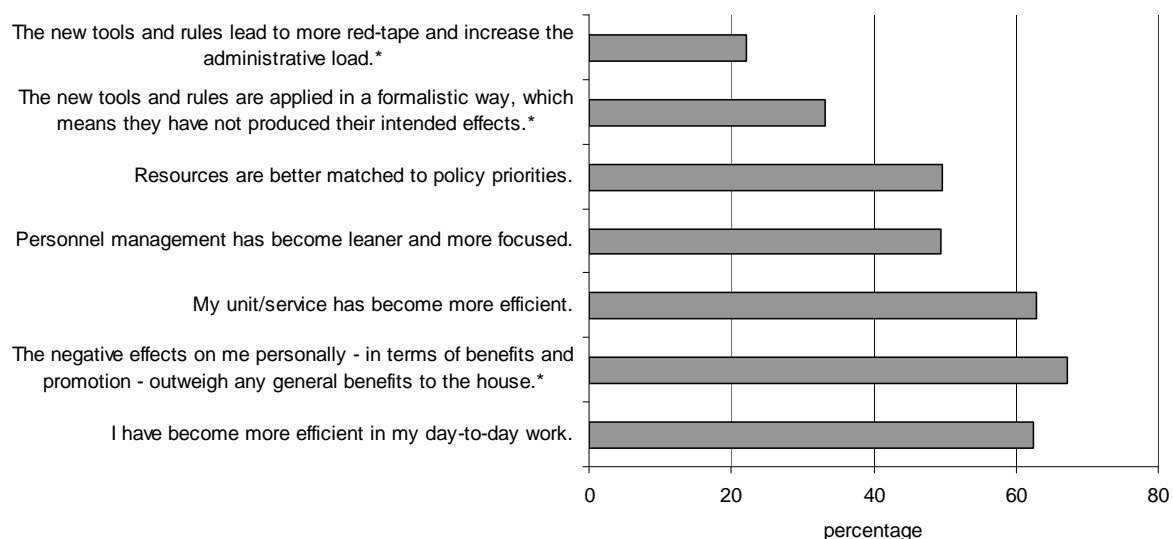
⁷ This means that the sample contains no individuals from the countries that recently joined the EU. However, running the same regression models with the EU12 shows that they are actually much more positive in their assessment of the Kinnock reform than individuals from the EU15. Nonetheless, since the EU12 cannot possibly assess the status quo ante, i.e. whether things have become "more efficient" etc., they had to be removed from the sample. Consequently, the sample consists of 1,008 Commission officials with their attitudes towards the administrative reform. Because of missing values in respect to single items of the dependent variable, I retained 707 interviewees and their general acceptance of the reform. The subsample used for this analysis and the "excluded" subsample were analysed to see whether there are systematic differences between them that would indicate bias. None were found.

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 the recent organisational change or, at least, remain neutral in their assessment, i.e. by giving a neither-nor answer. One sees that there are features of the reform that obviously are viewed very critically. About 70% of our interviewees agree, for example, that “the new tools and rules lead to more red tape”. Other statements such as “my unit/service has become more efficient” or “I have become more efficient in my day-to-day work” are assessed quite positively, however. Around 65% of the interviewees agree with or remain neutral with respect to these statements. One may argue about what it means if somebody’s response to such a statement exhibits “neutrality”. Is it not – from the perspective of reform zealots – actually a failure if officials remain lukewarm to essential features of the administrative reform? Nonetheless, whatever our assessment of “neutrality” in this context, we still have to recognise that there are large segments of staff that by now embrace the Kinnock reform and have come to a differential and often quite positive assessment.

Table 1: Acceptance of Kinnock Reform in Percent⁸

⁸ A more detailed version of this table is provided in the Appendix.



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

Let us now proceed with a simple statistical analysis (OLS regression) that produces a relatively clear picture. The opportunity variables do well and as expected; senior managers (if compared to normal staff), for example, do approve of the reform more than middle managers (if compared to normal staff) – which demonstrates the robustness of the argument that the higher an individual's position in the hierarchy, the greater the enthusiasm for the Kinnock reform. There is also a clear confirmation that those who see their career prospects as being endangered tend to dislike the Kinnock reform. Learning and ideology variables do badly, however; there is only one significant regression coefficient (administrative traditions), and this relationship actually goes in the opposite direction to what is theoretically expected, i.e. individuals from laggard countries actually seem to like the Kinnock reform *more* than individuals from NPM forerunner countries. The variables of the melancholy hypothesis also do badly. Individuals who see a loss of power of the Commission in favour of the member states do indeed significantly dislike the Kinnock reform;

however, those who see the Commission as losing power to the European Parliament do not dislike the reform. In other words, we do not see a clear pattern.

Table 2: Regression models: Acceptance of administrative reform

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Opportunity</i>			
Middle managers	0.147* (0.081)	0.171** (0.081)	0.166** (0.081)
Senior managers	0.392*** (0.140)	0.423*** (0.137)	0.422*** (0.137)
Career prospects	-0.340*** (0.042)	-0.351*** (0.041)	-0.358*** (0.041)
<i>Learning</i>			
Administrative traditions	-0.208** (0.084)	-0.190** (0.082)	-0.188** (0.082)
Work experience in private sector	-0.085 (0.077)		
Economists	0.218** (0.108)	0.200** (0.096)	0.206** (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* (0.050)	-0.078 (0.049)	
Loss of power for the Commission 2	-0.133*** (0.044)	-0.124*** (0.042)	-0.159*** (0.039)
<i>Control</i>			
Length of service	-0.016** (0.008)	-0.017** (0.008)	-0.017** (0.008)
Lawyers	0.038 (0.087)		
Age	-0.011* (0.007)	-0.012* (0.007)	-0.013* (0.007)
Female	-0.093 (0.093)		
Constant	2.259*** (0.369)	2.442*** (0.331)	2.355*** (0.328)
Observations	551	561	564
R-squared ⁹	0.23	0.23	0.23

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

⁹ R-squared remains low across all models – 0.23 – but this is well within 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 or her expectation of fair treatment in view of professional career management are the strongest predictors for acceptance of the management reform.

The explanatory programme "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 are actually more positive about the Kinnock reform than those from countries that apply NPM more comprehensively. Private sector experience or training as an economist also appears to have no influence.

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

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

In sum, the refinement of our explanatory programmes puts the relationship between hierarchical position and fear of the reform's impact on one's own career development at centre stage. The opportunity explanation clearly bears the most explanatory leverage.

6. Conclusion: Getting Used to Kinnock

The question at the focus of this paper was how staff relates to recent organisational 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. The main aim of this paper was thus to systematically deduce hypotheses from theoretical approaches and to put them to an empirical test.

One may criticise the quality of the data and the way the three explanatory programmes – opportunity, learning and EU ideology – were constructed, and possibly also many other features of the data and arguments presented. Is the quality of the operationalisation of each of the variables that were conceptualised really comparable? Is the theoretical “anchoring” of the respective programmes in general theories of popular attitudes research really justifiable given that Commission officials are a highly qualified administrative elite? Are the three programmes truly theoretical competitors on an equal footing? Tackling such questions is not easy.

At any rate, taken at face value, it appears quite interesting that only opportunity, i.e. the refinement of the utility maximisation approach, exhibits clear and robust relationships. The general theoretical discussion about conceptualising and explaining elite beliefs obviously does not end here. Nonetheless, it appears to me that refining the various programmes and looking for approaches at a “meso” level that combines purely “economic” and “social” explanations is the way ahead. My interpretation of the analysis is that if a stimulus such as the Kinnock reform may

have direct and concrete implications for the working life of individuals, it may also 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 themselves, what we do not observe in the data is probably as interesting as what we do 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 within the Commission to 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 demonstrate convincing explanatory power.

By contrast, officials in the Commission appear not at all averse to change with respect to new challenges at the workplace. In general, the acceptance levels of the Kinnock reform as measured by the dependent variable I used are quite high. Neutral or positive attitudes towards organisational change disappear, however, when an individual’s own career advancement is endangered. Where career prospects fade, opposition to organisational change increases.

Thus, one important insight provided by this study is that Commission officials, however grudgingly, have by and large accepted the new state of the art in terms of management culture inside their organisation. It is thus time to “de-dramatise” the Kinnock reforms and to acknowledge that a kind of managerial normalisation has taken place. The staff of the Commission appears somehow to have got used to the reform; routines seem to have emerged as to how to handle its paradoxes and

pathologies. Commission officials are an international bureaucratic elite and an immensely professional class of civil servants. Provided administrative modernisation does not interfere with their prospects for a good career, they embrace, or at least do not oppose for very long, even dramatic organisational change. Internal management may always not run 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 on visits to Brussels: *on s'arrange*.

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Appendix

1. Dependent variable

Question: We would like to ask your views on the 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						
3) My unit/service has become more efficient						
4) Personnel management has become leaner and more focused						
5) Resources are better matched to policy priorities						
6) The new tools and rules are applied in a formalistic way, which means they have not produced their intended effects						
7) The new tools and rules lead to more red tape and increase the administrative load						

2. Factor analysis

Factor analysis/correlation	Number of Observations	=	707
Method: principal-component factors	Retained factors	=	1
Rotation: (unrotated)	Number of Params	=	7

Factor	Eigenvalue	Difference	Proportion	Cumulative
Factor1	3.47455	2.58536	0.4964	0.4964
Factor2	0.88920	0.09048	0.1270	0.6234
Factor3	0.79871	0.13606	0.1141	0.7375

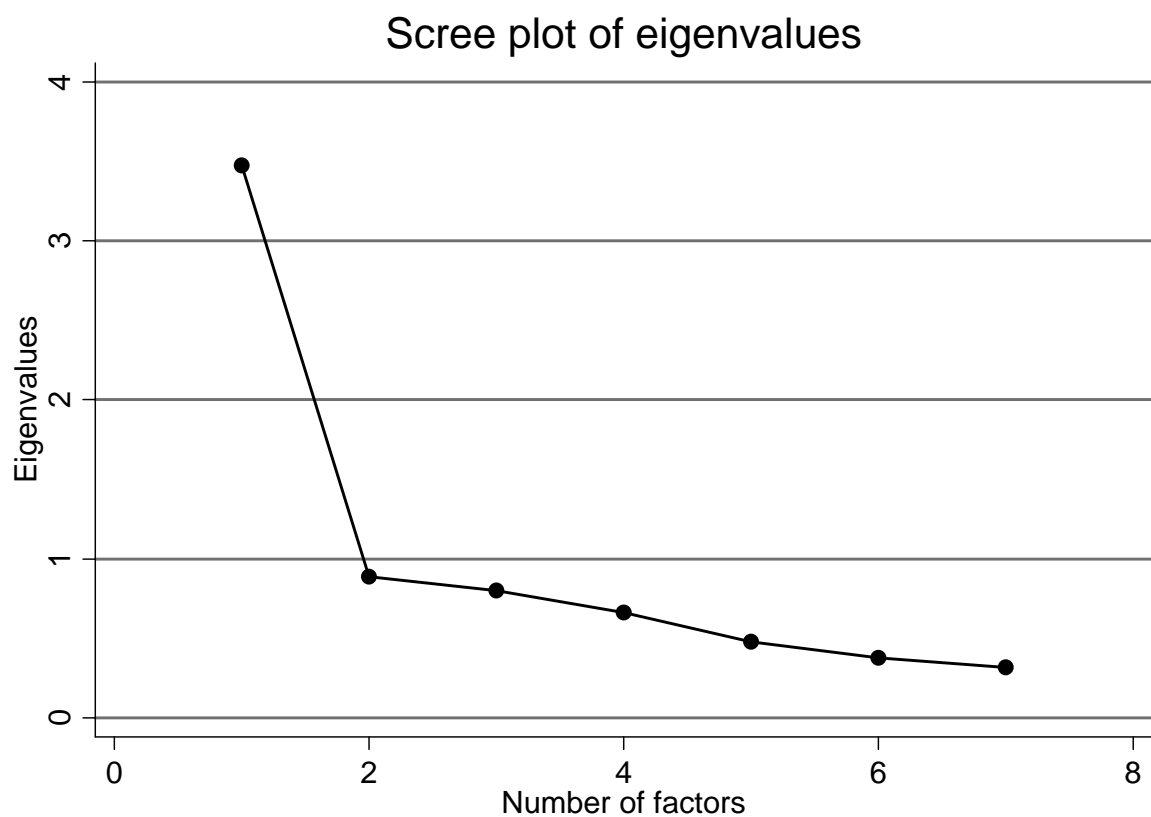
Factor4	0.66265	0.18459	0.0947	0.8322
Factor5	0.47806	0.10069	0.0683	0.9005
Factor6	0.37737	0.05793	0.0539	0.9544
Factor7	0.31945	.	0.0456	1.0000

LR test: independent vs. saturated: $\chi^2(21) = 1662.40$ Prob> $\chi^2 = 0.0000$

Factor loadings (pattern matrix) and unique variances

Variable	Factor1	Uniqueness
personalefficiency	0.7212	0.4799
personalcosts	0.5028	0.7472
unitefficiency	0.8127	0.3395
managementfocus	0.7387	0.4543
resources	0.7336	0.4618
formalisticreform	0.7332	0.4624
administrativeload	0.6478	0.5803

3. Scree plot

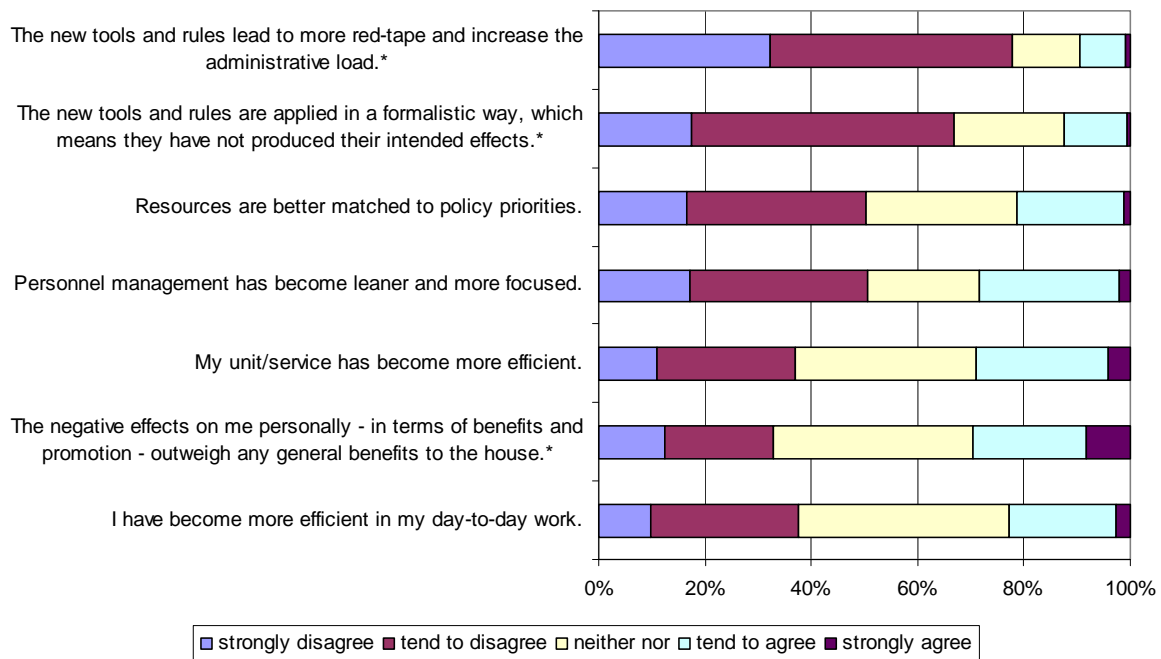


4. Independent variables: Coding

Approach	Variable	Hypothesis	Data Source	Coding
Opportunity hypotheses	Middle manager	The higher the rank, the greater the reform acceptance	EUCIQ 20: What is your current position?	1=middle manager, 0=other
	Senior manager	The higher the rank, the greater the reform acceptance	EUCIQ 20: What is your current position?	1=senior manager, 0=other
	Career prospects	If there is a perception of recent unfair career management within the Commission, 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 – main degree subject	1=economics, 0=other subjects
Ideology hypotheses	Supranationalism	Supranationalists should exhibit lower reform acceptance	EUCIQ 128: Some argue that member states – not the Commission or European Parliament – should be the central players in the European Union. What is your position?	0=strong intergovernmentalist, 1=somewhat intergovernmentalist, 2=neither nor, 3=somewhat supranationalist, 4=strong supranationalist
	Entrepreneur	Those who see tasks of the Commission in entrepreneurship for integration should exhibit low reform acceptance	EUCIQ 132: The more member states the EU has, the more important is the Commission's role as a policy initiator	0=strongly disagree entrepreneur, 1=sw disagree entrepreneur, 2=neither nor, 3=sw agree entrepreneur, 4=strongly agree entrepreneur
Melancholy theses	EU idealism	EU idealists should exhibit 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 losing out politically should exhibit 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 losing out politically loser should exhibit 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 engineering should lead to lower reform acceptance	EUCIQ 7: Education – main degree subject	1=law, politics or engineering, 0=other subjects
	Length of service	The longer the length of service, the lower the	EUCIQ 4: Year of entry to the Commission	Years of service

		reform acceptance		
	Age		EUCIQ 123: What is your year of birth?	Years
	Female		EUCIQ 124: What is your gender?	1=female, 0=male

5. Additional details for 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 to these statements have been recoded 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 provides an overview of the additional regression analyses. On the left-hand side we list the results for OLS regressions of middle managers, on the right-hand side those for senior managers.

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 at a low 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 recognise the different observation numbers in the sub-samples. We see our above findings confirmed with respect to the single explanatory variables. The two explanatory variables “career prospects” and “loss of power for the Commission 2”, especially, show highly significant regression coefficients with the theoretically expected sign.

	Middle manager		Senior manager	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
<i>Opportunity</i>				
Career prospects	-0.237*** (0.065)	-0.249*** (0.062)	-0.378*** (0.123)	-0.463*** (0.107)
<i>Learning</i>				
Administrative traditions	-0.179 (0.132)		-0.365 (0.252)	
Work experience in private sector	-0.150 (0.115)		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)	
Length 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 instruments¹⁰

The reform of the European Commission introduced different instruments that (are intended to) contribute to good governance within the supranational institutions. In the following table, we examine the acceptance of 13 instruments among our Commission officials. These dependent variables are binary coded (i.e., have improved versus not improved the capacity to do the job). Thus, the tables show the results of logistic regression models and report those variables that had been significant in the full model. Obviously, no variable which had been significant in the above models seems to have influence all of the 13 models for the NPM instruments. However, the utility variable “career prospects” is significant in nine regression models, while “senior manager” is significant in seven. Although “administrative traditions” had a medium level of significance in the analysis of the general reform acceptance, this variable seems to be less influential with 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 averse to the evaluation instrument than Commission officials from NPM leader countries. The regression results paint 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 the other models.

	Detailed job description	Annual appraisal exercise	Deciding staff requirements	Promotion	Training opportunities
<i>Opportunity</i>					
Senior manager				0.787* (0.471)	
Career prospects	-0.356*** (0.112)	-0.426*** (0.118)	-0.361*** (0.126)	-0.612** (0.237)	
<i>Learning</i>					

¹⁰ As information on these items is only available for middle and senior managers, we use the former as the reference category in the regression analysis.

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>					
Length of service		0.044* (0.024)			
Lawyers					
Age		-0.056** (0.024)			
Female		-0.636** (0.303)			
Constant	0.096 (0.293)	1.850 (1.127)	-0.557* (0.334)	-1.726*** (0.580)	0.123 (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 prospects	-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***		

Loss of power for the Commission 2		(0.145)		
<i>Control</i>				
Length 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 prospects	-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>				
Length of service		-0.020 (0.017)		
Lawyers				
Age				
Female				
Constant	0.036 (0.513)	-0.836* (0.427)	-0.918*** (0.123)	-1.246*** (0.418)
Observations	386	408	408	391

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