RECOVERING THE CRAFT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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

Westminster governments were enthusiastic reformers of their public services. Indeed, they are all categorized as "core NPM states" by Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011, 124). An important result of the reforms was to push to one side the traditional craft skills of senior public servants. These skills, however, continue to have much utility. We need to recognize that the old craft skills of traditional public administration remain important. The first section provides the baseline for this discussion by describing the main characteristics of traditional public administration, and the reforms associated with NPM and NPG. Section 2 defines the craft. Section 3 discusses the craft skills of counseling, stewardship, practical wisdom, probity, judgment, diplomacy, and political nous. Finally, the article discusses ways of systematically recovering craft skills, and comments on the wider relevance of the notion of craft.

It is not a central aim of this article to criticize either NPM or NPG. It is not a question of traditional skills *versus* the skills of new public management or network governance. Rather, we need to strike a better balance between the old and the new. It is a question of what works;

of which skills fit in a particular context. The pendulum has swung too far for too long towards the new and the fashionable. It needs to swing back towards bureaucracy and the traditional skills of bureaucrats as one part of the repertoire of governing.

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

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

From traditional public administration to the new public governance

Table 1 summarizes the shift from traditional public administration to the new public management to the latest wave of reform, the new public governance.

[Table 1 here]

Traditional public administration

We turned our backs on traditional public administration; it was seen as the problem, not the solution. Of course, the bureaucracies of yesteryear had their faults and the reformers had a case (see for example Osborne and Gaebler 1992; Pollitt 1993). For example, in Britain, the Fulton Committee (Cmnd 3638 1968, 9 and 11) inaugurated the era of reform with its diagnoses that the civil service "is still fundamentally the product of the nineteenth-century" and the "structure and practices of the Service have not kept up with the changing tasks". Most notoriously, it claimed "the Service is still essentially based on the philosophy of the amateur (or 'generalist' or 'all-rounder') and this "cult is obsolete at all levels and in all parts of the Service". Margaret Thatcher subscribed to this view (Hennessy 1989, Part IV). Yet, the defining characteristics of traditional public administration are not red tape, cost and inefficiency. Rather, the phrase refers to classic bureaucrats working in a hierarchy of authority and conserving the state tradition. In Table 1, their task is to provide policy advice for their political masters and oversee the implementation of the politician's decision. Politicians, political staffers and even some public servants continue to hold important misconceptions about the past of our public services. They forget that bureaucracy persists

because it provides "consistent, stable administration", "equity in processes", "expertise" and "accountability" (Meier and Hill 2005, 67; see also Goodsell 2004).

According to a former Head of the British Home Civil Service, Sir Edward Bridges (1950, 50, 51, 52 and 55-57), the generalist has four "skills or qualities". First, they must have "long experience of a particular field". Second, they have the specialized skills or arts of the administrator; for example, of spotting "the strong and weak points in any situation". Third, the civil servant should "study difficult subjects intensively and objectively, with the same disinterested desire to find the truth at all costs". Finally, the civil servant must "combine the capacity for taking a somewhat coldly judicial attitude with the warmer qualities essential to managing large numbers of staff" (Bridges 1950, 50, 52 and 55-57). Or, turning to more recent times, James (1992, 26), a former civil servant, summarizes the required skills as "the capacity to absorb detail at speed, to analyze the unfamiliar problem at short notice, to clarify and summarize it, to present options and consequences lucidly, and to tender sound advice in precise and clear papers" (see also Wilson 2003).. Traditional public administration continues to be characterized as an art and a craft as much as it is a science, and public servants are generalists; that is, a profession based on craft knowledge.

The new public management

The last 40 years have seen three waves of NPM reforms (and for a more detailed account see: Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011, chapter 1; and Rhodes 2011, 23-33). In Table 1, the first wave of NPM was managerialism or hands-on, professional management; explicit standards and measures of performance; managing by results; and value for money. That was only the beginning. In the second wave, governments embraced marketization or neoliberal beliefs

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

What are the implications for the public servants of NPM reform? The search for better management remains at the forefront of civil service reform, and better management means the practices of the private sector. Two examples out of the embarrassing number available will be enough. The UK Coalition government's *Civil Service Reform Plan 2012* focuses on skills and competencies. The focus is management: for example, "the Civil Service needs staff with commissioning and contracting skills; and project management capabilities need a serious upgrade" (2012, 9). Australia had The Advisory Group on Reform of Australian Government Administration (2010) and *Leadership and Core Skills Strategy* and *Integrated Leadership System.* [1] In both countries, leadership is often invoked and it refers to managing government departments.

This obsession with NPM had adverse effects on traditional skills. For example, Pollitt (2008, 173) gives his recipe for losing institutional memory: rotate staff rapidly, change the IT often,

restructure every two years, reward management over other skills, and adopt each new management fad. All three departments in Rhodes' (2011, chapter 7) study of British government met most of these criteria. He found poor record keeping, the annual postings of the best staff, and high staff turnover. Add internal reorganizations, managerial reform, especially the successive waves of the delivery agenda, and it can be no surprise that ministers complained about the loss of memory. And ministers come and go, rarely lasting more than two years. From her observational fieldwork in the British Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), Wilkinson (2009, 14) concluded that corporate memory was the preserve of the bureaucracy. Without it, "policymakers lose the knowledge of their constitutional context, departmental history, and awareness of which policies have succeeded and failed in the past."

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

The new public governance (NPG)

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

The first point to note is that whereas NPM inspired a vast array of management reforms, NPG inspired relatively few reforms in Westminster government. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011, 198-8 and 212) see joining-up – or integrated service provision through better horizontal and vertical coordination - as one of the main themes of reform. It has "grown in prominence internationally since the turn of the century" (see for example: Cm 4310 1999; Management Advisory Committee (MAC) 2004).

What does NPG say about the role of the public service? What are the new skills? Torfing et al. (2012, 156-9; and chapter 7) suggest the traditional role of the public service is "supplemented" (not replaced) with that of "meta-governor managing and facilitating interactive governance". Their task is to "balance autonomy of networks with hands-on intervention". They have various specific ways of carrying out this balancing act. They can "campaign for a policy, deploy policy narratives, act as boundary spanners, and form alliance with politicians". They become "meta-governors" managing the mix of bureaucracy, markets and networks (see also: Koliba et al. 2011, xxxii and chapter 8). The meta-governing public servant has to master some specific skills for managing networks. They include: integrating agendas, representing both your agency and the network; setting broad rules of the game that

leave local action to network members; developing clear roles, expectations and responsibilities for all players; agreeing the criteria of success; and sharing the administrative burden (see also: Agranoff 2007; Denhardt and Denhardt 2000; Goldsmith and Eggers 2004; Goldsmith and Kettl 2009; Klijn and Koppenjan 2015. and Rhodes 2006).

So, the neutral, competent servants of the political executive must now master the skills for managing the complex, non-routine issues, policies and relationships in networks; that is, meta-governing, boundary spanning, and collaborative leadership. The task is to manage the mix of bureaucracy, markets and networks (Rhodes 1997b). The public service needs these new skills but it is a step too far to talk of these new skills requiring "a full blown cultural transformation" (Goldsmith and Eggers 2004, 178). Indeed, part of the problem is this call for transformative cultural change. As Sir Arthur Tange (1982, 2), former secretary of the Australian Department of Defense commented, the reformers had "demolished or at least fractured the symmetry of the Westminster model." However, they had not replaced it with "a coherent structure of ideas to be a guiding light for loyalties and behavioral proprieties in the Federal Public Service."

Recovering the craft

Recovering the craft skills is important because reform has been only partially successful. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011, 155) describe the results of reform as a "half empty wineglass" because we don't have the data about efficiency or outcomes. Reforms have only been partially successful because they ignored the central role of the minister in running the department. Critics who blame the public service for the slow pace of change should look instead to ministers. They are the main wellspring of change in government and they are not interested in public service reform. In the eyes of both ministers and secretaries, the job of

ministers had not been transformed by either NPM or NPG. They continue to live in a world of blurred accountability: as one secretary commented, "the current arrangements are fraught with ambiguities – and remember this suits both sides". Ministers and top public servants are political-administrators dependent on one another if they are to succeed. Public servants recognize both the dependence and the critical role of ministers. One secretary suggested that "clarifying the role of ministers and officials is the major unresolved constitutional question" (cited in Lodge and Rogers 2006, ix and 63).

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

Second, management is not a core ministerial skill. If you imagine yourself in a minister's or a secretary's shoes, performance management does not matter much. Useful, but not where the real action is. As Sir Frank Cooper, former Permanent Secretary at the British Ministry of Defense observed with characteristic vigor, the minister-as-manager was "nonsense" because "it's not what they went into politics for" (cited in Hennessy 1989, 609; see also Rhodes 2011, 88-90 and 292-3).

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

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

The confusions and ambiguities at the heart of public service reform are all too obvious from a recent public disagreement between the government and the public service in Britain. Francis Maude, Minister for the Cabinet Office responsible for the civil service, criticized publicly an internal civil service document setting out the job description for a secretary. The

document stated that secretaries need to balance "the needs and demands of Ministers and high-level stakeholders within Whitehall and externally with stewardship of their Department and its customers". Maude claimed this statement was "without constitutional propriety" and the civil service should focus on "the priorities of the government of the day". According to the BBC, the document "enraged cabinet ministers" because it contained the statement that the secretary "tolerates high levels of ambiguity and uncertainty and rapid change – and at times irrational political demands". Lord Butler of Brockwell, former Head of the Home Civil Service, considered the document accurate and observed that "There is nothing there that I wouldn't have put down in black and white". [2] What is clear is that agreement on either the stewardship role of the civil service or on the proper relationship between ministers and public servants remains elusive. Revisiting the old arts would seem timely.

The Craft Skills

The old craft skills remain essential because they focus on ministers; on meeting and managing their political needs. It was a hard lesson for one secretary who was not a career civil servant. It was the first time he had worked with a national politician and it involved "a steep learning curve". His position was "uncomfortable" and his "credibility was knocked with the department" because he spent the first year "getting up to speed on the political-management side of the job". In sum, "what I hadn't understood at that point and which I understand much better now is (a) the [minister] and (b) the political perspective". He had to learn the craft skills and to give the minister what he wanted.

But phrases such as craft knowledge, the generalist public servant, and profession skate over the surface of their skills. What is their craft knowledge? If the focus is on the craft then we

need to explore what public administrators do in their specific context – on how things work around here. So, we need to systematize their experience and practice.

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

In seeking to identify the "traditional" skills, the researcher cannot consult a defining text, or definitive survey, of these skills, which depend on both individual talents and the context in which they are exercised. Indeed, existing lists of skills are about what skills the public servant *ought* to have in the era of NPM, not descriptions of the skills public servants deploy in their everyday lives. So, the analysis is based on the skills most commonly discussed in the existing literature, especially on the reflections of practitioners, and research monographs reporting interviews with practitioners. [3] Whenever possible, the analysis is illustrated also with the words of the political-administrators at the head of departments of state. As with the example at the beginning of this section, most of these quotes are drawn from a database of

some 140 interviews with ministers, public servants and political staffers conducted with my colleague Anne Tiernan since 2002 (and continuing).

Counseling

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

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

The claim poses some intractable questions. Why should they be the arbiters of what is in the public interest? What is the basis of their claim to act authoritatively? Is it legitimate? Are they accountable? The call for political responsiveness by politicians in Australia sprang from a determination to end the reign of an Imperial public service that took too much on itself. In

the UK, it brought the categorical assertion that the interests of the government of the day were the public interest (Armstrong 1985). In both these countries, and elsewhere, the public interest is seen as the preserve of democratically elected and accountable politicians, not unelected administrators, with the public servants in a hierarchical relationship to their political masters.

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

Stewardship

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

Terry (1995) sees the heroic or transformative model of leadership with the "great man" radically changing the organization and disdaining its existing traditions as a threat to "institutional integrity". An institution has integrity when "it is faithful to the functions, values, and distinctive set of unifying principles that define its special competence and character" (Terry 1995, 44). The task of administrative leaders is to preserve this institutional integrity; that is, to conserve the institution's mission. They must balance the autonomy necessary to uphold integrity with responsibility to elected politicians. Administrative leaders practice "administrative conservatorship" or stewardship (Watt 2012, 9). The practices of stewardship are "a form of statesmanship", which "requires professional expertise, political skill, and a sophisticated understanding of what it means to be an active participant in governance". Or, to employ an everyday simile, public leadership is like "gardening", needing time, patience, experience, and political awareness. They are "quiet leaders" who are in the job "for the long haul". They are about continuity, learning from the past and preserving institutional memory (Frederickson and Matkin 2007, 36–8). Indeed, much government is about coping, the appearance of rule and keeping everything going (Rhodes 2011); it is about stewardship.

Secretaries in Australia have heeded this particular call. The Advisory Group on Reform of Australian Government Administration (2010, 5) in *Ahead of the Game* identified stewardship as an important role for departmental secretaries. They saw it as necessary "to ensure that the APS has the capacity to serve successive governments." Also, it preserved "less tangible factors" such as "the trust placed in the APS and building a culture of innovation and integrity in policy advice". [4]

Practical wisdom

Goodsell (1992, 247) unpacks the notion of "practical wisdom." He considers public administration as "the execution of an applied or practical art". It is concerned with helping practitioners find the right "tool". Public servants must become *masters* of their craft; that is, become experts. They acquire this mastery through *practical learning*, which recognizes "traditional craft knowledge is not systematically codified and written down. It is known informally, passed on verbally to apprentices and journeymen over time". Through this mastery and practical learning, public servants build a sense of identity; an *esprit de corps* – the French phrase encapsulates more than the prosaic English equivalents of "loyalty" and "morale". Finally, this identity breeds pride in one's work and a willingness to accept *responsibility* for it (adapted from Goodsell 1992, 247-8; see also Waldo 1968).

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

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

Probity

When Kane and Patapan (2006, 713 and 719)) talk of the Aristotelean moral virtues relevant for public administration, they itemize courage, temperance, generosity, magnanimity, mildness, humor, truthfulness, moderation, and wisdom. Harold Nicolson (1950, 126), a former British diplomat, took for granted the virtues of intelligence, knowledge, discernment, hospitality, charm, industry, courage and tact. The UK Civil Service's code highlights the four values of integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality. [5] All have in common the idea that public servants should have the quality of possessing strong moral principles; that is probity. The lists vary in length and emphasis but honesty, decency and loyalty are always there. When a colleague revealed secret information, one secretary thought it was "unbelievable" that a man in a "tremendous position of trust" working to the minister had "betrayed" the minister and his civil service colleagues.

Judgment

The ability to make considered decisions is close to practical wisdom but under this heading I want to explore a distinctive notion; "appreciation". Introduced by Sir Geoffrey Vickers in 1965, the idea was a pioneering contribution the role of sense making in organizations (see

also Weick 1995). For Vickers appreciation is the web or net of reality concepts and value concepts we use to make sense of the observed world and of how we communicate in that world. Appreciation is about the mental maps we use to make our way in the world.

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

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

Diplomacy

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

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

Political nous

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

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

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

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

Conclusions: it's the mix of old and new that matters

NPM and NPG have introduced valuable reforms. It would be foolish to favor the waste of public money. Better management that seeks to improve economy, efficiency and effectiveness is like mom and apple pie; everyone agrees it is good, so it is it is hard to

criticize. Network governance needs new skills in managing the mix of bureaucracy, markets and networks. Such meta-governing involves policy narratives, boundary spanning and collaborative leadership. But in adopting these new skills we must not forget that traditional skills remain essential, and need protecting; for example, institutional memory. Traditional, NPM and NPG skills all remain relevant. It is not a question of traditional skills versus NPM and NPG. It is a question of what works; of what skills fit in a particular context. This conclusion recaps the main argument, discusses ways of systematically recovering craft skills, and comments on the wider relevance of the notion of craft.

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

policy innovation in the department. But whether their relationship is good or bad, reform of the public service demands clarity not only about the role of the secretary but also of the minister.

The craft persists. In the 1950s, Sir Edward Bridges wrote that it was "the duty of the civil servant to give his Minister the fullest benefit of the storehouse of departmental experience and to let the waves of the practical philosophy wash against ideas put forward by his ministerial masters". In the 2000s, the head of the Australian public service insisted "we have something unique to offer" and itemized the capacity to stand apart from vested interests and focus on the national interest; and experience about what works (Watt 2012, 5). The quotes span sixty years, yet both public servants share a distinct and distinctive craft. Despite the many challenges posed by the various waves of "reform", their profession continues to offer counseling, stewardship, practical wisdom, probity, judgment, diplomacy and political nous. Such remarks can be dismissed either as apologia for yesteryear or as special pleading by the public service. No matter, they are still describing the craft of public servants. What we need now is a more systematic account of those craft skills drawing on current experiences not, as here, the fragmentary historical record.

How do we find out what we do not know about the craft of the public administrator? Ethnographic fieldwork is well suited to this task (Rhodes 2015). It asks the simple questions of "how do things work around here?" and "how do you do your job?" Participant observation is the best method for answering these questions but a combination of ethnographic interviews and focus groups would tease out the tacit knowledge characteristics of all crafts. Thus, the focus groups could comprise recently retired secretaries and the group interaction would produce the data (see, Agar and Macdonald 1995; and Rhodes and Tiernan

2014). The skills identified in this article could provide the background and the starting point. Of particular value would be their commentary on one another's insights, experiences and opinions about their craft. If former ministers could also be persuaded to participate in their own focus group, the contrast between the two would be instructive.

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

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

The most important skill of all is the ability to choose between, and manage the mix of, skills whether traditional, NPM or NPG. At the heart of their craft is the ability to learn from

experience and alter the mix of skills to fit both the specific context in which they work, and the person for whom they work. The traditional skills of bureaucrats need to be part of public servants' training, and of the repertoire of governing (Goodsell 2004).

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

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

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Notes

(1) For the UK, see, for example: http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Civil-Service-Reform-Plan-acc-final.pdf; For Australia, see, for example: http://www.apsc.gov.au/learn/aps-leadership-and-core-skills-strategy-2014-15-refresh/leadership-and-core-skills.

(2) See: "Indicators of Potential for Permanent Secretaries." The document was produced by YSC, business psychology consultants, for the Cabinet Office. Available@: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/07_07_14_permanentsecretary.pdf. The comments by Maude and Butler can be found@: http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-28202293. These debates are common to most Westminster systems, and for a comparative review see Rhodes, Wanna and Weller 2009.

(3) See for example: Barberis 1996; Bridges 1950; Butler 1992; Campbell and Halligan 1992; Campbell and Wilson 1995; Lodge. and Rogers 2006; Podger 2009; Rhodes 2011; Savoie 2003; Shergold 2004; Wanna et al. 2012; Wass 1984; Watt 2012; and Wilson 2003.

(4) On Australia see, the *Public Service Act* 1999. On the UK see, the Civil Service Code available @: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-code.

(5) Available@: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/civil-service-code. On the values of the APS see: http://www.apsc.gov.au/publications-and-media/current-publications/aps-values-and-code-of-conduct-in-practice.

Table 1: <u>PA, NPM and NPG Compared</u>

Paradigm/Key elements	Theoretical roots	State tradition	Unit of analysis	Key focus	Resource allocation mechanism	Core beliefs
Public Administration **(PA)**	Political science and public policy	Unitary/ Federal	The political-admin-istrative system	Policy advice and implement-ation	Hierarchy	Public sector ethos
New Public Management **(NPM)**	Rational choice theory and management studies	Regulatory	The organization	Management of organizational resources and performance	Markets	Efficiency, competition and the market
New Public Governance **(NPG)**	New Institutionalism and network theory	Different-iated	The network	Negotiation of values, meanings and relationships	Networks	Trust and reciprocity

Source: Compiled from Osborne 2010; and Rhodes 1998. For a similar table showing that this analysis is relevant to the USA, see: Bryson et al. 2014.