1 Civil service systems: introduction and scope of the book

Andrew Massey

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this book is to compare and contrast the different approaches that exist for organizing the structure and activities of different civil service systems. This task is set within the context of discussing basic theories and frameworks that provide a disciplinary perspective. Furthermore, the book aims to explore some recurring issues and themes with regard to civil service systems and in doing so to compare a selection of different national systems. Accordingly, the book is divided into two parts, with part one consisting of chapters one to five exploring the historical and theoretical context of public administration and public sector management. Issues and perspectives considered here include the Weberian legacy, joined-up government and the hollowed-out state thesis, as well as the debate between Anglo-American influenced systems versus the Continental European approach to organizing the civil service. Part two (chapters six to fifteen) then explore some international comparisons. Clearly this cannot include every system that exists around the globe, so a decision was taken to explore a selection of states taken from the northern and southern hemispheres, North and South America, Africa, Asia, Australia and Europe. Given that these include China, Japan, India and the US, over half the population of the world is represented, but more importantly, so are a selection of mature and emerging administrative systems that start from very different perspectives on what it means to construct a civil service. Each of the country specific chapters addresses, in its own way, the historical context of that system, as well as its legal context, accountability structures, basic statistics (in most cases) with regard to size, structures (agencies, central departments and any ad hoc organizations), recent reforms and important issues facing them in the current climate of reform. The chapters also explore the relationship of the civil service system to the other parts of government and the public sector.

There is no universally accepted definition of civil servant and civil service. The succeeding chapters demonstrate that, in some jurisdictions civil servants include nearly all of a state’s civilian employees, for example
in France teachers and university lecturers are included in that country’s civil service list. While in the UK the term civil servant is more closely defined and after the privatizations and modernization programmes of the last 30 years, civil servant is a term that applies for the most part only to civilian employees of central government departments, industrial civil servants having been (mostly) removed from the public payroll (Flynn 2007). Whilst in the US there is a different system again, whereby for example, all postal workers are deemed federal civil servants, and each US state overlays the functions of the federal government with public employees of its own. The way each culture and country views its most senior civil servants also varies, with the US retaining a mistrust of ‘big’ government, while the French view their fonctionnaires from a decidedly different perspective. The approach of the Indian and East African systems is also at odds with that of China, Japan or Argentina, as discussed by the different authors in this book. The growth of governance (and the conceptual development of that notion) as applied to public sector institutions (Laegreid and Verhoest 2010) further complicates an already labyrinthian complexity of varying administrative systems. For the purposes of comparison and academic review, it would be easier (at least in terms of the nomenclature) to refer to public administration, or simply to public service. But that would be to miss a more focused review of the core officials who are closest to ministers, the people who for the most part are a key element of the policy making and policy implementation process in most states.

This is not to underestimate the value of a broader analysis of public administration per se which is core to understanding the way in which a country’s government relates to its people; the relationship between the institutions of the state (public administration) and those of civil society is the key interaction, the fundamental political forum. As noted elsewhere:

> a state’s public administration reflects the political and social values and practices of a country. The public sector is an essential element in maintaining a society’s cohesion and prosperity; the way in which it serves the state and wider society may be seen as a manifestation of its social and political ‘conscience’. Public administration is central to the continuation of the social contract of all but the most totalitarian of societies. Along with the rule of law and a properly functioning civil society, it is the mechanism by which the constitutional settlements of states are made to work; on occasions it throws into stark outline their failings in this respect. A properly functioning democracy and the development of good governance are dependent upon an effective and ethical public administration. (Massey 2010, p. 194)

For more than 30 years there has been an epidemic of radical change globally within the public sector. Its original epicentre had been the think tanks and universities in Chicago, Virginia and elsewhere; the driving
intellectual force behind Public Choice Theory that transformed the old state bureaucracies, first in the US and UK, then seeping out through the professional networks of consultants, financial advisers and management gurus it spread across the globe. The Bretton Woods institutions of the World Bank (1981) and International Monetary Fund adopted New Public Management (NPM) as a new orthodoxy and enthusiastically carried it as vectors to the states of the former Soviet Union, Asia and Africa, where it sometimes transmogrified into toxic forms (Anyang’Nyong’ 2002; Massey 2010). It has restructured the way we think about public administration and ‘in different countries and at different times this change has variously been labelled as “re-engineering”, “new public management”, and “modernization” and has been driven by forces such as technological innovation, political fashion, Europeanization or globalization. Across the world the public sector has experienced change at all levels’ (Massey 2010, p. 194).

Given the foregoing points, it is useful to remind ourselves that public institutions ‘are always means and never ends’ and that:

choice among alternative modes – at least among the ‘finalists’ under review – always involves tradeoffs: Improvements in one or more performance measures are realized only at the sacrifice of others. That is true even when the comparison is among efficiency attributes. It applies a fortiori when socio-political features are introduced. (Williamson 1985, p. 408)

The lesson of public administration generally and civil services more particularly is that they have attempted to embrace the change challenges engendered by the global reformation of the public sector, but the approach taken in each country reflected the choices made by the citizens and the political elite on their behalf. These choices are constrained by previous decisions that appear in the guise of laws, custom and practice, sunk investments in plant and machinery, budgetary commitments; in short they are the historical legacy inherited by each generation and come accompanied with a complex set of cognitive biases (Pollitt 2008). It is clear to most observers that:

just as nature abhors a vacuum, so politics and public administration rarely, if ever, present decision makers with a tabula rasa; everything in terms of policy decisions takes place in the way it does because of what has gone on before and what is going on around and nothing can be entirely replicated when it crosses geographical and cultural boundaries. (Massey 2010, p. 195)

To study civil service systems is to be immersed in the often prosaic and mundane workings of the machinery of government; the vital connections between power and accountability, wealth and responsibility, indeed the
practicalities of ensuring the redress of grievance. The process of redress is at the heart of good governance and the proper functions of a responsible civil service.

As noted above, the chapters that follow in the second part of this book engage with the civil service systems in different countries. Those that discuss various developing countries, especially those in Africa, show how the concern for good governance as a way of ameliorating poverty and economic tardiness can be traced to the independence struggles during the colonial era. The colonial governments established regulatory bodies and marketing boards to oversee agricultural production and sales. The governments of the newly independent states developed this base to establish public enterprises, nationalized industries and parastatals in order to ‘maintain a high degree of public control over national resources as a means of facilitating national growth’ and promote social justice (Ikiara 2000, pp. 44–5). Efforts were made to provide educational and medical facilities as well as to build the communication, financial and transport infrastructure to develop trade and agriculture (Anyang’Nyong’O 2002, p. 7). During the 1980s and 1990s, at a time when many western countries were implementing a period of re-engineering and modernization using the loose set of principles collectively labelled NPM, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund were exploring ways of reforming African economies by using some of these methods (ibid.; World Bank 1981).

It was an attempt at policy transfer, sometimes referred to as mimetic isomorphism and coercive isomorphism, in that the Bretton Woods institutions:

took the view that the policy of liberalization including privatization had been ‘good’ for those economies that had taken it the furthest, the US, UK, Australasia and the Tiger economies of the Far East. The reasoning followed; therefore, it would also be ‘good’ for the former Soviet Union and Africa. Advisors from the World Bank and other influential NGOs pushed African governments into copying western patterns of liberalization and state restructuring (mimetic isomorphism), while often loans, aid and favourable trading agreements were contingent upon such reforms (coercive isomorphism). (Massey 2010, pp. 196–7)

More recent social science research has suggested this approach to be overly simplistic. The successful policy transfer of liberalization and NPM to Malaysia, South Korea and Singapore reflected very different socio-political constructions and relationships between the political elite and civil society and it was not a straight copy. It was an approach that integrated the policies with the prevailing social, economic and political institutions, without challenging those institutions (Common 2001). A stark contrast to other parts of the world.

The process of reform and the globally evolving political system of
increasingly integrated polities has led to the realization that each state’s civil service develops and changes to a greater or lesser extent as part of the evolution of multi-level governance (Laegreid and Verhoest 2010). The EU Commission defines governance as, ‘rules, processes and behaviour that affect the way in which powers are exercised at European level, particularly as regards openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence’ (in Massey 2005, p. 8). Globally, however, the concept of governance as a description of the realization that with few exceptions hierarchical and bureaucratically centralized government is no longer the dominant form of political system, in most states a more pluralistic concept of power, albeit in a series of structures often dominated by powerful coalitions of interests, exists. It is:

an organizational and institutional diversity and complexity increasingly explained as a differentiated polity. This analysis views the state as being transformed into an enabling state whereby the role of government is to ‘create the conditions in which other organizations, most notably those located in the private sector, can prosper’ (Richards and Smith 2002, p. 20, quoted in Massey 2005, p. 6). This views a nation’s core executive as less able to depend upon giving orders to ensure the effective implementation of its policies, but must rely instead on diplomacy and negotiation to ensure it gets its way. (Massey 2010, p. 196)

Multi-level governance, therefore, exists in several forms in different contexts and the concept of the differentiated polity recognizes the role of regional political organizations, devolution, federalism, professional groups, international corporations and other institutions in governance. Thus:

multi-level governance, then, takes place at the supranational level, both global and regional; the national level, where sovereignty remains legally located, but from which much has migrated, and at the sub national level. (Massey 2005, p. 7)

National governments, especially those in developing nations, are wary of losing their ability to control the policy process within their own borders and have often responded negatively to the challenge set by intergovernmental organizations.

1.2 THE APPROACH OF THE FOLLOWING CHAPTERS

As noted above, the rest of this book is divided into two parts. The first part explores the historical and theoretical underpinnings to different
civil service systems. Accordingly, in chapter two Barberis delivers a magisterial review of the Weberian legacy. In this he notes that although Weber was a ‘quintessential polymath’, working in diverse fields such as philosophy, research methodology, history, religion, politics and law, it is his work in public administration and management that has had a far-reaching and long-lasting impact. Barberis considers the Weberian ideal type state bureaucracy to be something regarded by later generations as a part of the ‘constitutional apparatus for a properly functioning liberal democracy’. This was to be a state that is a product of the age of reason, grounded in democratic legitimacy and possessing strong authority drawn from that legitimacy. Although rarely existing in the ‘real world’ the ideal type’s traits and underlying notions regarding the merit system, the importance of ‘office’ and leadership provide a theoretical toolbox from which to draw resources for understanding current civil service systems.

Horton uses chapter three to explore the contrasting Anglo-American and Continental European civil service systems, noting the common heritage, but divergent history of the British and US versions. Within the Anglophone group are located the civil services of the US and UK, as well as those of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, India and much of Africa, while the Continental European system is heavily influenced by the French and German traditions. Parts of Africa, South America and Asia follow this example. Horton explores how this historical context conditions our definitions of civil services and concludes that although important such comparisons are not easy because the traditions are context specific and often path-dependent. Perhaps the biggest divergence between the two traditions is the cultural one that informs much of current US political debate; the Anglophone countries accept the need for government, but often distrust it, while the continental tradition often identify the state with public welfare and modernization. Chapter four moves the discussion into the realm of decentralization, devolution and explores the ‘hollowing out of the state thesis’. Pyper argues that the persistence of change has become a prevalent theme affecting civil service systems across the globe and that much of this reform is designed to reduce the burdens of over-centralized government, while some is driven by the call for devolved power to the regions of various countries. All such reforms have considerable consequences for civil service systems and Pyper concludes they have contributed to the evolution of the differentiated polity. But he argues against the danger of over-generalization, noting that ‘national governmental characteristics remain significant; acting as the main dynamic upon a state’s civil service system’.
In chapter five, Halligan, Buick and O’Flynn close part one by extending the theoretical and historical perspectives into an analysis of the recent moves towards joined-up, horizontal and whole-of-government approaches in Anglophone countries. They begin by observing that second generation reform ‘in Anglophone countries gave prominence to horizontal, cross-government, cross-boundary and inter-agency questions. Having previously emphasized disaggregation and the diffusion of delegated and contractual responsibilities.’ Much of this has been driven by the desire of governments to focus on outcomes, rather than outputs in terms of service delivery and long-term change, rather than short-term fixes. They demonstrate how the different aspects, or ‘strands’, of ‘whole-of-government’ approaches constantly evolve and wax and wane according to the interest and commitment of governments. Some examples, such as the ambitious Australian agenda received a great deal of government support and bureaucratic drive, yet still foundered after a few years, having failed to have a fundamental impact. Attempts to force the disaggregated parts of government to work together create new tensions leading to ‘dysfunctional’ by-products and raises significant issues in terms of organizational design.

Part two begins with chapter six by Borgonovi and Ongaro and discusses the Italian civil service. They chart the series of reforms applied to the Italian civil service over the period since the collapse of the post-war party system in the early 1990s. They link these changes to the observations of Hood and Lodge (2006) with regard to the implications of the changes for ‘public service bargains’ and in particular the trend towards a more political and politicized civil service and a new relationship between politicians and administrators. Chapter seven by Anagnoson addresses the structures that exist with the US and begins by noting that the system is unique and heavily influenced by the federal nature of the governmental system. The historical context includes the ‘spoils system’, but early administrations were uncorrupt and efficient in contrast to European states. Anagnoson traces the evolution of the US service through several landmark Acts as well as important Presidential administrations and closes by listing a series of contemporary issues, including the perennial questions regarding the balance between political appointees and professional career administrators. Ferraro explores what he refers to as a ‘splendid ruined reform’ with regard to the civil service in Argentina, in chapter eight. He discusses the success, or otherwise, of the reforms of the early 1990s and traces them up to the present time, noting how the intention was to bestow a ‘Weberian’ character upon the civil service in the form of meritocratic recruitment, internal promotion, job tenure and improved salaries. This followed from a period of military dictatorship.
that he characterizes as ‘bureaucratic authoritarianism’. But the continuing mistrust in which the politicians hold the civil service has had a profound and continuing effect on the reform attempts and indeed upon the civil service itself.

Chapter nine is provided by Kauzya, an academic who is also a career official at the UN. In this chapter he explores the comparative perspectives and challenges facing East Africa, in particular the civil services of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. He begins by noting the ‘remarkable similarities’ between the three countries, largely due to the historical fact that prior to the 1960s they were part of the UK’s East African Empire. The different paths the countries have pursued since independence, however, have ensured that there is as much divergence as there is historical convergence. Kauzya meticulously describes the structures of the civil service systems and records their approach to a number of pressing problems, such as HIV/AIDS. He concludes by suggesting the reform process in all three countries is continuing and due to the rapid rate of modernization and change, the reforms themselves are far from finished. The reform developments includes Client Charters and are mirroring NPM approaches attempted elsewhere, albeit located, indeed rooted within the African context. Chapter ten by Dwivedi and Mishra remains focused within the Anglophone orbit, but addresses the civil service system of the world’s largest democracy and in population terms, its second largest country; India. They chart the historical legacy, the cultural context from the classical and Mughal era through British rule to the post-independence reforms designed to forge and structure a uniquely Indian civil service and more recently to add impetus to the drive for modernization and superpower status. They point out the continuing problem of corruption and steer the reader to consider the emerging challenges for the national bureaucracy. These are numerous, but include the salient concerns of the need to ‘put citizens first’; how to integrate the vast apparatus of the national and regional bureaucracy and strengthen professionalism and the merit principle.

Evans moves the debate across the Himalayas in chapter eleven, to the world’s most populous country and its emerging superpower, the economic phenomenon that is the People’s Republic of China. He suggests that the developing bureaucratic structures are reflecting the incremental and pragmatic political and bureaucratic reforms taking place. China’s leaders witnessed the implosion of the Soviet Union and the rise of frightening levels of crime and gangsterism, indeed a ‘lootocracy’ in some states that resulted from the former Soviet Union as civil society imploded (Massey 2010) and resolved to prevent its occurrence in China. Recent Chinese history remains scarred by warlordism and
Civil service systems: introduction and scope of the book

civil strife and the reforms in that country need to be seen within this historical context. Evans charts the different legacies in modern China and lists a series of dilemmas confronting the current leadership in terms of how they may continue the restructuring of the country’s civil service, a service that has at one and the same time the world’s most ancient and enduring heritage, as well as the challenge of being the globe’s most modern and powerful manufacturing economy. Chapter twelve keeps our attention on the Far East as Nakamura and Kikuchi deliver an elegant and complex explanation of the Japanese civil service. They argue that Japanese public administration is ‘at the crossroads’ with a toxic combination (for Japan) of declining public trust in government and the need for enforced civil service reform during a period of fiscal retrenchment and cutback management. They chart how Japanese administrations have spent over 40 years attempting to reduce the size of central government, using a variety of reform techniques. Like its neighbour, China, Japan has steadfastly followed a path of national interest. During the period of financial difficulty around the globe, this has insulated the Japanese economy and Japanese public administration from panic-driven reforms.

In chapter thirteen Halligan and Sadleir address the Australian public service system, a federal system of nine state civil services that overlay the national federal civil service. There are some similarities with the US system, as well as having British roots at its core. They begin by adopting a theoretical perspective that it may be analysed in several dimensions using several models, identifying different and significant dimensions. They explain the historical, legal and accountability context and then describe the structures of the system. They conclude with a discussion of the issues and dilemmas confronting the modern Australian public administration system, and in particular its civil services. Duggett and Desbouvries use chapter fourteen to discuss the civil service in France and ask if it is an example of a ‘contested complacency’. They explain and analyse the historical and cultural context of the French civil service and the legacy it has both inherited and given to other parts of the globe. Having explored the structures of the French civil service they proceed to discuss the challenges it faces and the prospects for the success of the Sarkozy agenda. The final chapter is a review of the UK’s reforms up to, but not including proposals by the coalition government elected in 2010. Parry sets the historical context and then reviews the legal, constitutional and accountability structures inherent to the UK civil service. He looks at the role and functions of the different elements and concludes by exploring the notion of the civil service as a kind of permanent government, imbued with values of impartiality and objectivity.
REFERENCES


