

Civil Service Policy-Making
Competencies:
Comparing Ministries of Industry in
Three Countries

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SETTING THE SCENE

- Introductory comments
 - A brief history of this project since 2001 in the UK, Germany and Japan
- (c) Order of presentation
- Christopher Hood on the UK DTI and German BMWi
 - Hideaki Shiroyama on the Japanese METI
 - Martin Lodge on some of the overall themes coming out of the three cases

The Structure of this Talk

- Civil Service Competency – What’s New, and Who Cares?
- Who Means What by Competency
- The Three Dimensions of Competency Explored in this Study
- Civil Service Policy-Making Competency and Ministries of Industry in the Contemporary World
- Distinguishing Some Different Types of Policy Problems
- Competency and Policy-Making Investigated in DTI and BMWi: The Organizations, the Method, the Cases, the Findings
- Some Policy Implications

Civil Service Competency: What's New and Who Cares?

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- Different regimes require different competencies from their civil servants, and civil service reform often attempts to change competencies
- Competency in bureaucracy was traditionally equated with technical expertise and special knowledge in the German case, but in the recent past (from the 1970s) new ideas about competency have developed with a more behavioural emphasis

Who Means What by Competency

1. Strategic management usage of ‘competency’ to denote organizational aptitude or capacity, with the idea that strategic managers should identify and concentrate on the ‘core competencies’ of their organizations

2. Human resource management usage of ‘competency’ to denote the aptitude or accomplishments of individuals:
 - (a) The accomplishment approach: demonstrable skill or ability to perform a particular task
 - (b) The behavioural approach (increasingly stressed since the 1970s): the attitudes or behavioural qualities that are needed to perform a particular task excellently

Which of these meanings of ‘competency’ do bureaucracies embed into operating routines?

The Three Dimensions of Competency Explored in this Study (A Synthetic Approach)

- Background and experiences (where individuals come from and who they have interacted with before)
- Technical or substantive knowledge (what they know - craft skills and formal knowledge)
- Behavioural contribution to task accomplishment (what individuals contribute to the social process of policy-making, for instance in conflict resolution or memory roles)

Policy-Making Competency in Industry Ministries; What Particular Demands do they Face?

- Changes in environment for civil service in general
e.g. 24 hour news environment
- Growing internationalisation of standard-setting, changing markets and technologies, new interconnections between industrial and other types of policy
- Pressures on traditional patterns of consultation with business industry through internationalization of market actors or merging of industry sectors, and problems of identifying and accessing 'best in world' expertise

Four Types of Policy Problems (as identified by DTI and BMWi civil servants)

- Policy stretching: limited political & social conflict, limited institutional and stakeholder complexity
- Policy resetting: medium conflict based on shared policy principles, high complexity of institutional and stakeholder environment
- Conflict brokerage: policy issues fundamentally contested, medium institutional complexity
- ‘Wicked issue’ handling: highly contested environment, highly complex institutional and stakeholder environment

Competency and Policy-Making Investigated (1)

- The Organizations: three Industry ministries - past glory days, institutional differences and contemporary challenges
- The Method: tracing the 'biography' of selected policy documents (2 for each department in this study) to assess what aspects of competency were contributed by policy teams and whether it reflects expected profile given particular type of policy problem

Competency and Policy-Making Investigated (2): The Policy Documents Whose Biography We Traced in DTI and BMWi

- **UK 2001 Competitiveness White Paper:** policy stretching exercise, some joint working, high managerial emphasis on control of process, product criticized for lack of policy substance
- **German 1998 Competition Law change:** Criticized for approaching policy resetting as policy stretching
- **UK 1998 Energy Review:** Successful management of politico-bureaucratic crisis with limited resources
- **German 2000 ‘Energy Dialogue’:** Complex negotiations over energy mix policy with no point of authority and further difficulties created by inflexible organisation

Competency and Policy-Making Investigated (3): Findings

- The team competency profiles in DTI and BMWi were more alike than might have been expected, though DTI was more flexible in its hiring policy
- Variation in the competency profiles of policy teams across the different policy problems was fairly small and did not follow the expected pattern
- Some of the key contributions made by civil servants to policy making were not explicitly recognized (in other than a very vague and general way) in the behavioural and civil-service-wide UK competency framework and the extent to which competency was ‘embedded’ in organizational practice appeared variable

Some Policy Implications

- The ‘wrong problem’ problem: some of the most serious weaknesses in DTI and BMWi that were diagnosed by participants and informed observers lay not in individual competency but in organizational processes & teamwork
- The production of competency frameworks in DTI and BMWi was methodologically questionable and was not focused on the specifics of industry ministry tasks
- Problems of jeopardy and futility in competency policy: (a) potential merit system issues in vague and plastic lists of behavioural desiderata (b) the ‘tick-box’ problem and the risk of turning the real issues with competency into superficial or no real change rather than re-thinking of structure and processes

Some Cross-Cutting Themes

1. Consultation

- different dimensions of consultation
- Selection and management of consultation processes (actors and methods)

2. The role of ‘economic thinking’ and the educational/career backgrounds of policy teams and departments

3. How to be a ‘world class’ industry department in staff quality

- recruiting ‘best in world’ staff
- national staff in an international environment