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Section thématique 45

Formes de compétence et savoirs de gouvernement

Axe 1

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Changing Top Civil Servants' Skills at School. The diffusion of competency frameworks in France and Great-Britain.

Although Great-Britain and France are usually considered in the Anglo-Saxon literature of *public administration* as “most different cases” concerning administrative reforms, the figure of the “generalist” civil servant is currently being challenged in both countries by a new managerial conception of the competences expected from members of the “senior civil service”. In Britain, “competency frameworks” have begun to develop in the mid 1980’s and have been reformed and refined by successive governments. A framework entitled “Leadership for results” has been developed by the New Labour government of Tony Blair, and has been implemented since 2001 (Hondeghem, Horton, Scheepers, 2005: 564-569). A “National School of Government” has been founded in 2005, which offers a wide range of development courses for members and aspiring members of the Senior Civil Service. In 2007, a new initiative called “Professional Skills for Government” was launched by the Cabinet Secretary Sir Gus O’Donnell, listing the different skills a civil servant should possess according to its grade. In France, this question has also progressively reached the political agenda. Since the mid 1990’s, several reports have put forward the notion of “encadrement supérieur”, and argued in favour of a new definition of skills and occupations (“métiers”). The main institution for the initial education of senior administrative generalists, the *Ecole Nationale d’Administration*, had been challenged by successive reforms that have questioned the relevance of its monopoly over senior civil servants initial training and criticized the procedure of nominating the *énarques* at their first position on the basis of a competitive examination held at the end of the school (“*classement de sortie*”). A new reform has been launched in March 2009 that aims at replacing this procedure by a process of recruitment more able to evaluate the “competency” of the young recruits, outside academic knowledge. These reforms occurring in both countries are somehow surprising if we look at the existing comparative literature, according to which the two countries illustrate two different “administrative cultures” (Peters, 2001) and belong to different clusters of countries in the various typologies of bureaucratic regimes (Pollitt, Bouckaert, 2004). How to explain, then, the occurrence of the above mentioned development in allegedly very different countries? Are the two countries not so different in matters of higher civil service education and training? Or are the reforms labelled under the vague term of “competencies” covering a much diverse reality of mechanisms, making them far less similar than they could appear at first glance? These puzzling questions have been at the basis of the following communication, which tries to explore the evolution of the competencies expected

from higher civil servants in France and in Britain in an historical perspective¹. One of its objectives is to qualify the widespread – if not general – assertion opposing French and British administrative systems, which is mainly based on a-historical term to term comparisons and is not sufficient to account for recent – and also less recent - developments in matters of education, training and development of higher civil servant on each sides of the Channel. The first section aims at building the comparability between two “most different cases” as France and Britain, arguing that debates around senior civil servants’ competencies should be put back in their respective national and historical contexts in order to understand the types of skills traditionally valued in each of the two countries and the role of such institutions as the National School of Government and the *Ecole Nationale d’Administration*. This framework being briefly described, the following sections suggest a possible chronological outline to understand the evolution of debates around higher civil servants’ competences in a comparative perspective. Contrary to the common picture, the two higher civil services were in their first phase of institutionalization not so different. Although differences of contents in initial educations reflecting differences in the structure of higher education in the two countries infused French and British higher civil servants with different types of knowledge, the figure of the senior bureaucrat remained rather similar (section 2). It is only in a second period that attempts to “professionalize” the civil service led to very different institutional arrangements in matters of initial education and training of higher civil servants on the two sides of the Channel. In this period of reform, which happened in both countries although with an important chronological discrepancy of fifteen to twenty years, types of skills expected from higher civil servants seem to become a crucial point for debate, but each country ends up with its own singular solution, that tends to accentuate differences between French and British higher civil servants (section 3). New approaches to the competencies of higher civil servants come back on the political agenda – if they ever left it – in a more recent period characterized by new trade-offs relative to the rules of the game on administrative labour markets at the top (section 4).

“Competency” in different contexts: Comparing Skills and Schools in British and French higher civil service.

As we already remarked, France and Great-Britain are considered in comparative literature on administration and new public management reforms as two “most different cases”. Scholars working more precisely on civil service systems (Bekke, Perry, Toonen, 1996) have come to a similar conclusion, ranking Britain in the Anglo-Saxon family of countries prone to “easy diffusion” of neo-managerial reforms (Halligan, 2003) and France being placed among west European continental States that have been more inclined to preserve institutional *status quo* (Bekke, Van der Meer, 2000). This general opposition between the two countries is to a certain extent being reflected in the types of skills expected from higher civil servants and consequently in the role of training institutions in each of the countries. However, as one goes along the fieldwork investigation, contextualization of the two case studies allow a better understanding of the national evolutions of senior civil service policies. Some of the categories of the administrative vocabulary commonly used to characterize administrative systems in general and the French-British opposition in particular, seem to be potentially misleading, either because of their much controversial definition in each of the countries – as the notion of “higher civil service” itself; or because of translation difficulties, of differentiated connotations, or because of the difference between the theoretical principle and actual characteristics of the system. It seems to us that the definition of some of the core concepts such as “politicization”, “merit”, “elitism” or “career” are sometimes taken for granted by existing typologies, without taking into account the variety of meanings, connotations and realities that they cover in different countries. In our case, the concept of “generalist” deserves specific attention.

Indeed, although both France and Britain consider their higher civil servants as “generalists”, this notion designate, despite the apparent correspondence of terms, rather contrasted realities in each of the countries. The British generalist differs from its French counterpart as for the very nature of the skills it possesses when he enters the civil service. The French *généralistes* are literally fabricated at the *Ecole*

¹ This communication is part of a PhD research on the reforms of training, recruitment and management of higher civil servants in France and Great-Britain, which began in October 2007 and is currently in progress.

Nationale d'Administration (most of the time after having pre-fabricated at *Sciences Po*), where they not only learn behavioural skills and administrative *ethos* (Eymeri, 2001), but also receive a solid education in public law, public finance, and *general* culture in *administrative* matters, together with a somehow intensive practical training through many somehow technical exercises such as redaction notes (*notes sur dossier*) or meeting simulations. In a British sense, French higher civil servants are indeed specialists of law and administration, which is not the case of British top administrators, at least when they enter their first position as civil servants. In other terms, what is a “general knowledge” in France is a “specialized skill” in Britain. British senior civil servants are considered as generalists as opposed to such specialist as lawyers, statisticians, accountants, etc. They are recruited for the level of their university degree, whatever the discipline in which it has been obtained might be. Graduates entering the civil service may not have any specific knowledge related to their future job or public administration. Indeed, having studied at Oxford or Cambridge is the more decisive criteria, and having studied social sciences, law, or public administration appears to be far less important (Chapman, 1970: 58-59). Educational and training institutions have therefore different roles and status in each of the countries. French *hauts fonctionnaires* are recruited on the basis of an early commitment to administration (Silberman, 1993: 59-63) as they are progressively selected through successive institutions of education specifically designed to recruit higher employees of the State and receive a specific initial training at the *Ecole Nationale d'Administration* (ENA). After this initial phase of education, young recruits enter one of the *corps de la haute fonction publique*, in which they will develop their career without any formal complementary training. Contrasting with the French system, British top civil servants are recruited on the basis of a selective examination open to every graduate having achieved a certain level of excellence in its university. Rather than the nature and content of initial education, the level of the degree and the relative prestige of the university in which it has been obtained is a crucial criteria for recruitment. Further, post-entry training is made “on the job”, although some vocational training can be organized within departments. Central training for higher civil servants is traditionally residual and as we shall develop later, the Civil Service College has never been given the monopoly situation comparable to the ENA’s, even at the time when it was centrally funded.

In this context of high heterogeneity between the two cases, the question of what and how to compare becomes crucial if we are to avoid flawed comparison (Hassenteufel, 2000). For instance, comparing the reforms of the ENA with the evolution of the Civil Service College (today National School of Government) would consist of a term to term comparison, that would not take into account the respective status and roles of these two institutions within their specific national contexts, and ending up comparing somehow incomparable objects. In order to understand and explain the progressive emergence of a “competency approach” in each of the two countries, the comparison should rather take into account the complexity of the relationships between these schools and the broader field of training and development for higher civil servants. Within such a framework, it becomes possible to identify “common challenges” faced by the two systems of education, training and development of higher civil servants, and thus to move beyond a relativistic approach that would focus exclusively on each case’s uniqueness (Dubar, Gadea, Rolle, 2003: 63). For instance, despite existing differences, similar interrogations on the “professionalization” of higher civil servants can be traced back in both countries’ history. Further, both systems are not at all closed to each other. Rather, elements of a “crossed history” (Zimmermann, Werner, 2004: 15-49) and maybe attempts to transfer some of the Other’s ideas to one’s system can be observed. For instance, the model of the ENA has been very pregnant in Britain in the 1970’s, when the Fulton report criticized the “amateurism” of British higher civil servants. Although officially rejected as “elitist”, it has certainly inspired the courses designed for fast streamers and has deeply marked the first directors of the Civil Service College (Bird, 1995). More recently, the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union (EU) have been important forum for the circulation of ideas on the reform of higher civil services². Overall, bringing

² Cf. OECD reports such as Public Management Committee, “Managing senior management: Senior civil service reform in OECD member countries”, GOV/PUMA(2003)17, nov. 2003; Public Governance Committee, “The senior civil service in national governments of OECD countries”, GOV/PGC/PEM(2008)2, jan. 2008. Reports on senior civil service reforms have also been produced by governments at the Presidency of the EU: Milan Pagon, Emanuel Banutai, Uroš Bizjak, “Leadership competencies for successful change management. Study Report.”, Slovenian Presidency of the EU, June 2008; H. Kuperus, A.

history back in makes the general picture of the Franco British opposition more complex than it is sometimes told by taxonomic typologies of bureaucratic regimes: it enable us to underline at the same time national singularities and common or similar mechanisms at the core of senior civil service evolution in both countries.

Pragmatic culture, academic specialization and the generalist higher civil servant in France and Great-Britain: two faces of a same figure?

As we mentioned above, British and French higher civil servants are today both considered, in their respective countries, as “generalists”, although this common adjective covers very different contents in initial education. In Britain, there is traditionally no specific initial education programme for higher civil servants, but a direct entry scheme designed for graduates of the best universities. Training takes place ‘on the job’, mostly through informal transmission and sometimes through departmental training, although the higher grades of the civil service are said to be generally reluctant to engage in formal training programmes. Therefore, the British “generalist” is said to have a “pragmatic culture”, and is frequently opposed – in British civil servants discourses at least - to the French *énarque*, considered as “too much theoretical”. Some authors have explained this absence of initial specific training by the absence of differentiation between administrative and civil law in Britain (Peters, 2001). In France for instance, the *droit administratif* appears as a distinct subject and discipline that has to be studied as such, especially by people aiming at occupying top positions within the Administration. Although this argument can be part of the story, it remains quite functionalist in nature, assuming in the first place that what is taught has indeed to be learned. Furthermore, it ignores the implicit role of higher education and training in public service schools, namely in their “latent” or “hidden” contents whom they are the vehicle: beyond knowledge in public administration, administrative law and public finance, other types of skills are transmitted through these institutions, such as a certain *ethos* or behavioural competences (Eymeri, 2001a). Above all, this argument tends to ‘essentialize’ the British so-called “pragmatic culture”, and does not tell anything about its historical construction. Going back into history can shed a quite different light on this somehow ambiguous characterization of French and British civil servants as “generalists”.

Differences in contents of initial education appear as the projection of differences in the higher education systems of the two countries, but do not necessarily denote a difference in administrative role assigned to higher civil servants. From the end of the 18th century to the middle of the 20th century, French and British civil services were progressively institutionalized, gradually replacing the ancient heterogeneous systems of political and familial patronage by a form of ‘administrative patronage’ (Keraudren, 1994: 69-78) based on the competitive examinations coupled with *de facto* monopolies on the recruitment of higher civil servants reserved to specific higher education institutions. In Britain, the institutionalization of the civil service as a separate employment sector has taken place through the progressive consolidation of the Oxbridge monopoly on recruitments. Some crucial actors in the reforms of Universities, such as Benjamin Jowett at Balliol College, Oxford, were also involved in administrative reforms matter and contributed to build the Oxbridge quasi-monopoly over graduates’ recruitment in the civil service (Vernon, 2004: 41-47). Conversely, major administrative actors, often themselves with an Oxbridge background, looked towards these prestigious universities as the most desirable source of recruitment for the state. The British “generalist” and the so-called “pragmatic culture” having studied “Greats” in Oxford, or mathematics in Cambridge appears as the product of the historical “trade-off” between Oxbridge universities and the civil service and of the mutual reinforcement of the traditional links between these institutions. “As a matter of fact the papers in mathematics and natural science are based upon the requirements for honour degrees at Cambridge, the papers in classical and other subjects upon these of Oxford” (Lowel, 1908: 163, in Chapman, 1970: 39). This explains partly the very late introduction of a sociology paper, first set in 1961: “the subject had been taught for many years at the

Rode, “Hauts fonctionnaires en Europe. Gestion et conditions de travail des cadres supérieurs de la fonction publique dans les Etats membres de l’Union Européenne”, European Institute of Public Administration, European Public Administration Network, French presidency of the EU, december 2008.

London School of Economics and at some provincial universities, but the first lecturer in sociology was not appointed to Cambridge University until 1959 and to Oxford University in 1962” (Chapman, 1970:43). In France, the existence of the ENA and the major reforms of 1945 tend to obscure the progressive character of the shift away from patronage to the creation of competitive exams at the entrance of the various *corps* of the higher administration. Emerging progressively in debates surrounding the various political crisis of the 19th century, debates around the value of civil servants ended up in the concomitant creation of such examinations for every *corps* of the higher administration and of the *Ecole Libre des Sciences Politiques*. As in Britain, a *de facto* monopoly of the *Ecole* was progressively achieved notably through the adaptation of programmes to the different tests and based on the division of tasks between the faculties of Law and the *Ecole*, which courses were generally attended simultaneously by candidates to the civil service (Kessler, 1978: 19-25). The private nature of this *Ecole* and its socially selective character is also an important element of similarity with the British model: in both countries, these institutions were of elitist character and consolidated the links between a certain *bourgeoisie* and the political power.

Overall, in the first period of institutionalization of the civil service, figures of the higher civil servant in France and in Britain seem to a certain extent very closed to each other. In a sense, the specialist of administrative law working at the *Conseil d’Etat* and the so-called “pragmatic” English generalist from Oxbridge can be considered as two faces of a same figure: the “best and brightest” from a generation of well born young men – women being largely excluded from higher education, educated to become advisers of the Prince, “servants of the crown” or “*grand commis de l’Etat*”. Nevertheless, the above argument should not eclipse differences between France and Britain that are of potentially crucial importance to understand the growing differentiation between the two countries that we shall emphasize in the next section.

“Professionalizing” higher civil servants: differentiated responses to fragmentation?

This first figure of the higher civil servant is only half relevant since it tends to cover the complexity of each national system and especially the fragmentation of both civil services. It seems to us that this fragmentation, or rather attempts to overcome it, are at the core of a second period of higher civil service institutionalization, during which two distinct figures of the higher civil servant emerge and consolidate in each country. Both French and British civil service are highly fragmented, either by departmental “silos” or by a corporatist structure. However, each country seems to have attempted to resolve this issue in rather different ways. During the 20th century, both countries experienced different but comparable critical situations. These crises were certainly not of the same nature, neither did they occur exactly at the same time, but they have an interesting characteristic in common since they both led to reassess the quality of the higher civil service and entailed important reforms of its organisation aiming at “professionalizing”³ top bureaucrats. At this stage a hypothesis is that the nature of this fragmentation seems to have impacted on the means implemented to diminish it, namely in limiting the panel of solutions available to reformers.

In France, this movement of reform occurred immediately after the Second World War, when the hurtful memory of the 1940 defeat and the following “*collaboration*” marred the reputation and legitimacy of the administration in the eyes of the new government. At that time, the French civil service was the object of a double criticism on the grounds of its technical inabilities and its non-democratic recruitment, considered as the product of one main structural characteristic of the French system: its fragmentation. The order passed on the 9th October 1945 and creating simultaneously the ENA and a cross-departmental *corps* of administrators (*‘administrateurs civils’*) presents the reform as an attempt to

³ The term “professionalizing” is very central for our analysis, not only in a general and common sense - echoing the rhetoric of these reforms that aimed at developing specific competences considered as indispensable to every higher civil servant in both countries - but also in a more analytic sense of the solidification of mechanisms of regulation of the higher civil service as a singular “profession” in each country.

overcome the excessive specialisation and compartmentalization of the French Civil Service⁴. As reminded by M.-C. Kessler, this criticism was not new, and the idea of a school designed to deliver initial training for ministerial higher administrators can be traced back to the 19th century at least, when an *Ecole d'Administration* had been created by the ephemeral 2nd Republic (Kessler, 1978: 11-12). Such a project had been re-formulated in the 1930's by the *Conseil d'Etat*, but had triggered such a discontent among the various departments that it had been abandoned again before being re-placed on the political agenda by the new socialist government of the *Front Populaire* (*Ibid*: 25-31). Although the final success of these ideas can be attributed to a certain extent to the determination of a small group of influential people combined with exceptional circumstances (*Ibid*: 35), the new institutional arrangement appears as a compromise between different interests and contains elements of both continuity and change vis-à-vis ancient practices. Indeed, the corporatist fragmentation of French higher administration creates compartments within the French administration, but also entails a hierarchy between these various compartments acting as competing labour markets. In this respect, a certain specialization of qualities required to enter these markets can be interpreted as a means to close these little markets to the competition of others and to hold the young recruits relatively captive (Paradeise, 1984). The creation of an initial period of training, during which every new entrant into the higher civil service would compulsorily associate with its counterparts of the same generation and attend similar courses before the *promotion* being split into the various *corps* is admittedly an important step against the fragmentation of the higher civil service. However, the monopoly of the ENA did not really give birth to a unified *haute fonction publique*. To the contrary, the creation of a competitive examination at the end of the two years course, distributing the *énarques* in the various *corps* on the basis of “merit”, maintains – and even consolidates – the existing implicit hierarchy between these *corps*. In this respect it is not surprising that the creation of such an appointment procedure had been supported by the most prestigious and powerful *corps* in this hierarchy such as the *Conseil d'Etat* (Eymeri, 2001: 157-160). It is even probable that the creation of this ‘*classement de sortie*’ was one of the conditions of the acceptance by the *grands corps* of a school for administration in which their young recruits would be included⁵. Overall this new institutional arrangement strengthens the “mimetic corporatist strategy” (Thoenig, 1987: 35) at the core of the functioning of the French higher civil service and impose the figure of the “*généraliste*” civil servant to cover what is in reality a wide diversity of administrative working situations.

In the British case, concerns about the “professionalism” of civil servants seem to have emerged only some fifteen years later. The Second World War did not, of course, produce the same effect in victorious Britain than in defeated France. It is only in the 1960's, in a context of felt “British decline”, that criticism against the “amateurism” of higher civil servants came back on the political agenda. The Fulton report published in 1969 is to a certain extent an attack against the “pragmatic culture” described above. In matters of training, the foundation of a staff college was suggested, in order to “provide major training courses in administration and management” for “specialists”, “graduates directly recruited for administrative work”, for future “top managers”, “refresher courses” and courses for the “younger entry to help them compete with the graduates.”⁶. The college was only a part of the whole new institutional arrangement suggested by Fulton. Together with the creation of an independent Civil Service Department, the Committee advocated the unification of the top grades across various departments, creating a Senior Open Structure facilitating the circulation of higher civil servants. Behind the criticism of “amateurism” seem to hide some kind of professional considerations and an attempt to de-compartmentalize higher civil service careers. Indeed, whereas contrary to France, Britain had achieved the unification of higher civil servants recruitments in 1920 (Charlot, 1989:17-28), the civil service remained very fragmented in departmental “silos”. Like in France of the 1940's, it is striking that the promotion of a new figure of the competent civil servant is associated with attempts to overcome the administrative fragmentation.

⁴ Ordonnance n°45-2283 du 9 octobre 1945 relative à la formation, au recrutement, et au statut de certaines catégories de fonctionnaires et instituant une direction de la fonction publique et un conseil permanent de l'administration civile, *Journal Officiel de la République française*, 77eme année, n°238, texte 6379, mercredi 10 octobre 1945.

⁵ The *Conseil d'Etat* had already advocated in the past the creation of a cross-departmental *corps* of higher administrators and a school for administration, but these suggestions was not supposed to apply its own recruitment and training procedures, (Kessler, 1978: 26-27).

⁶ The Civil Service: Report of the Committee 1966-68, Cmnd 3638, I, para 100.

However, the Civil Service College inaugurated in June 1970 remained highly criticized throughout time and its whole history until present days can be interpreted as a quest for legitimacy - sometimes even survival - and the search for the appropriate positioning between academia, the central Government, and Departments. At the beginning, the unclear nature of the College's purpose and objectives, although probably needed to make the creation of the college possible on a consensual basis, surely reinforced the difficulties of the college's positioning. Although officially rejected by the Fulton Committee, the model of the ENA had remained a recurrent – and regrettable - reference at the end of the 1970's: "The *Ecole Nationale d'Administration* has exerted an almost fatal fascination over some British commentators for many years, seeming to be the holy grail of training" (Rhodes, 1977: 5). Indeed, the creation of the Administration Trainee and Higher Executive Officer (Administration) grades, together with the reform of the structure of positions at the top administration did entail the development of mandatory training programmes for civil servants aspiring to enter the Senior Open Structure, which is in a sense close to the model of the ENA. But these programmes were hardly a success, namely because of the lack of incentives for the trainees whose career was not related to their commitment into training programmes (Bird, 1995: 48-55). Behind the accusation of being "too much abstract" and disconnected from the reality of day-to-day work (Duggett, 2001), the strong resistance to the Civil Service College expressed the persistence of a deep departmentalism hostile to external – and independent - training. Therefore, reforms implemented after the Fulton report paradoxically reinforced the myth of the "pragmatic culture" of British higher civil servants, largely supported by departments.

Overall, similar concerns about the over-fragmented nature of the civil service seem to have entailed rather different "professional" strategies on each side of the Channel, whose main effect has been to reinforce the initial differences between the two countries. In France, the creation of a uniform rule of recruitment and the delivery of a uniform initial training for the various higher administrations paradoxically strengthened the corporatist fragmentation of the French system and consolidated the figure of the *grands corps* as a model for the others. In Britain, attempts to "professionalize" the higher civil service took place through the unification of the top grades within the Senior Open Structure and the development of post-entry training designed to equip higher civil servants with appropriate uniform skills, but the later objective clashed with the so-called "pragmatic culture" of higher civil servants – ie both with departmentalism and Oxbridge education. Eventually, at the end of the 1970's the stereotyped opposition between a French academic/ENA specialist of administrative law and the British bright "pragmatic" Oxbridge generalist seems to be consolidated by respective national response to the challenge of fragmentation.

"Competency" and the new configurations of administrative labour markets.

These figures have recently been questioned in both France and Britain, since reforms concerning the management of higher civil servants have been placed once again on the political agenda. Reforms display growing concerns about "skills" and "competences" of higher civil servants in both countries and give a new emphasis on training and development of top bureaucrats. In Britain, this move can be interpreted as the product of two different and contradicting dynamics. A "political" dynamic seems to have stressed the importance of creating a team of civil servants at the top focused on managing and implementing public policies. In the 1980's, in a context of heavy criticism of the civil service and high consideration for the private sector methods and business model, training seems, at first, to have been conceived as an opportunity to provide higher civil servants with new managerial tools and knowledge and perhaps also as a means to track new profiles of civil servants desirable to M. Thatcher's government in a context of personalization of senior appointments (Chapman, 1997). The "Top Management Programme" was created in 1985 and progressively became the "flagship programme" of the Cabinet Office for top civil servants above grade 3 (Under Secretaries). Although it did contain in its first versions a significant part of courses taught according to an "instruction" principle, one of its main purposes has always been to open the civil service to external influence and foster collaboration between higher civil servants and managers of the private sector. Reserved to a small pool of people occupying top positions in Whitehall and credible aspirants considered as "highfliers", this programme can be considered as an important break with the so-called "pragmatic culture" – ie with the Oxbridge model and

departmentalism. It is significant that it was not given to the College but rather kept under the responsibility of the Cabinet Office, the latter being a much stronger support for such a centralist initiative. The arrival of a New Labour government in 1997 seems to have offered an opportunity to consolidate the senior civil service as a distinctive population, in a context of reassertion of the public sector. Training seems to have appeared as a potential resource for the new government to get its hands on the higher civil service after nineteen years of Conservative governments. In 1999, the College was removed from its agency status⁷ and integrated back into the Cabinet Office, in a wider structure called the Centre for Management and Policy Studies (CMPS), whose objective was to put together activities of training, corporate leadership and policy studies. However, the young centre faced important difficulties in achieving this objective since the three constitutive poles of the new institution – composed of the college, plus two other units of the Cabinet Office – had different objectives that failed to be conciliated. As its first director resigned in 2004, a vast marketing operation was undertaken in order to transform it into what is now called the “National School of Government” (NSG), which was formally founded in 2005. An increasing visibility has been given to “Leadership development”, with the creation of the Centre for Strategic Leadership, which brings the majority of the programmes devoted to the senior civil service together under a common label. The “leadership approach”, aligned to the competency frameworks designed by the Cabinet Office in the realm of the Professional Skills for Government initiative launched in 2007, although supposedly concerning every levels of administration, is indeed mostly directed toward top civil servants. Most recently, the creation of “mandated” programmes from the Cabinet Office, which members of the Senior Civil Service are in principle supposed to take on, as a mandatory requirement, reflects the central “corporate agenda” of creating a more cohesive senior civil service, fostering cross-departmental collaborations in the implementation of public policies. In this respect, the New Labour government’s agenda for higher civil servants is not very different from M. Thatcher’s attempt to create and control a pool of valuable candidates to feed Whitehall’s top positions. One of the main differences, notably illustrated by the evolution of the TMP participants’ profile, is the new emphasis on collaboration within the wider public sector – ie with local authorities, NSH, etc – and not simply with the private sector. Against this first “political” dynamic, the development of training for higher civil servants can also be understood as a defensive response of higher civil servants to pressures towards the opening of the internal labour market constituted by the Senior Open Structure of the 1970’s. This “administrative” dynamic is notably illustrated by the progressive elaboration of competency frameworks supporting the transformation of the old ‘Senior Open Structure’ into the Senior Civil Service (SCS) in 1996. If the SCS did entail the removal of the security of tenure for its members and staff cuts, it is undoubtedly the product of a compromise realized by higher civil servants in order to preserve some sort of security and specificity to their career and status. In terms of competencies, the figure of the fast stream generalist is persistent, and it is striking that successive competency frameworks conceived in the 1990’s have stressed “behavioural” skills rather than technical ones, largely ignoring the contribution of specialists civil servants (Hood, Lodge, 2005: 810-812). Indeed, training programmes are not only a means for politicians to control higher civil servants, but also an opportunity for higher civil servants to strengthen the cohesiveness of the Senior Civil Service and its singularity vis-à-vis the rest of the civil service. For instance, the only mandatory programme of the NSG for senior civil servants is the “Base camp” induction session to the Senior Civil Service. Further, training is also an instrument for senior civil servant to plan and control their personal career development. Most recently, a new scheme has been designed and run by the Cabinet Office for senior civil servants called the High Potential Development Scheme (HPDS). The content and functioning of this scheme has not been studied in enough detail yet, but its official purpose is to “identify and develop staff at Director level and exceptional candidates at Deputy Director level (...) who have the potential to develop their careers further within the Civil Service (...) and prepare them for the most challenging posts the Civil Service has to offer (...) [providing them] with active development and career support over a three year period”⁸. The HPDS uses both competency

⁷ The College became an agency in 1989, and progressively shift to a full repayment funding scheme, as its central funding were progressively cut down in the 1980’s.

⁸ Cabinet Office, Civil Service Capability Group, Leadership and Talent Management, “High Potential Development Scheme”, Brochure, p. 1.

frameworks designed in the realm of *Professional Skills for Government* and the *SCS Leadership Framework*. If the scheme is not directly related to any sort of direct promotion procedure, it seems nevertheless that behind the “corporate leadership agenda”, training programmes for higher civil servants are increasingly focused on personal development and career management.

In the case of France, the “competency approach” challenges the legitimacy of the *Ecole Nationale d'Administration* (ENA) to the benefit of other training institutions and models. After having been associated to the newly created institution of the post-war moment, the *Institut d'Etudes Politiques* (IEP) seems to have progressively re-gained its autonomy vis-à-vis the ENA. Evolving towards the model of the “international business school”, developing autonomous programmes of education in “public affairs”, including professional training for civil servants, what is now called “Sciences Po” is a direct competitor of the ENA (Garrigou, 2001). The ENA “monopoly” on recruitment and training of higher civil servants is heavily criticized since 2002, when a report commended by the Civil Service Minister proposed to create alternative ways of direct entry into the *haute fonction publique* aiming at valuing new type of skills and competence and recommending the abolition of the competitive exam at the end of the school (*classement de sortie*), so that other criteria than academic results may be taken into account for the attribution of first positions. Although these measures were not fully implemented at first, the reform paved the way for further change in introducing tools of competence evaluation. For instance, competency evaluations conducted by external consultants have been introduced within the initial training programme. The whole organisation of the curriculum has been reformed to become more modular and specialized: it is now divided into three thematic blocs, respectively devoted to “Europe”, “Territories” and “Management, and the last three months are dedicated to a specialization. The “Territories” module is spent together with students of INET (*Institut national des études territoriales*), the territorial counterparts of the *énarques* in the French decentralized administration. The abolition of the *classement de sortie* has recently been announced by President Sarkozy and a new reform of the ENA is on its way. Apart from these reforms of the initial training programme, ENA tries progressively to diversify its activities, especially with in-service development programmes: professional development programmes have been conceived for newly appointed directors, seminars for the *administrateurs civils* appointed by internal promotion (*tour extérieur*) have been developed, international courses and activities have been a growing concern for the institution since it absorbed the *Institut International d'Administration Publique* (IIAP) in 2002. However, the market of in-service training and development is an increasingly competitive one as other institutions have developed similar offers. The IGPDE (*Institut de gestion publique et de développement économique*) is probably one of the tougher competitor to the ENA in these matters: attached to the Department of Economy and Finance, it has developed a wide range of training and development programmes focused on management, supporting the implementation of the LOLF⁹ (*Loi organique sur les lois de finance*).

Conclusion

Behind common concerns towards “competences” of higher civil servants lies the complexity of national situations and institutional arrangements. Nevertheless, it seems to us that a “common challenge” can once again be identified to understand issues at stake in a comparative perspective. At this stage of the research, a working hypothesis inspired from the sociology of work and labour market (Paradeise, 1984, 1988; Lallement, 2007) is that this new focus on “competence” can be interpreted as a response to the further transformation of administrative labour markets at the top of both French and British states. Indeed, since the middle of the 1980’s in Britain and the middle of the 1990’s in France, the internal labour markets institutionalized respectively through the creation of the Senior Open Structure and the foundation of the ENA became progressively porous to external influence from the private sector, but also from the wider public sector in a context of “agencification” and devolution in Britain, and of decentralization and structural reform of the State in France. These evolutions can to a certain extent appear as a threat for career senior civil servants, who have to face the competition of external actors for

⁹ The LOLF, adopted by the Parliament in 2001 and implemented from 2006 onwards has completely reformed budgeting rules and accounting methods for public spending in France, which is now organized in terms of targets and programmes.

the succession to senior positions – for instance when agencies’ chief executive are recruited from the private sector or when one of the most powerful instruments of the *grand corps* domination on the French higher administration are endangered by reforms of the ENA leading to the abolition of the final examination. However, these reforms can also appear as an opportunity for certain types of actors to gain or recover power and access to certain positions, when for instance the structural reforms of the French administration involves a new distribution of traditional “*chasses gardées*”. In this context, training and development can be used actors as an instrument in the negotiation of the new rules of administrative labour markets. In France, the shift from “qualification” to “competence” that has taken place in the private sector in the 1980’s has been analysed as a strategy to change the rules of regulation of the employment relationship to make it more flexible (Lallement, 2007: 136-148). One can wonder to what extent the move away from the model of the political adviser towards the “manager”, associated with the development of behavioural training and development can be interpreted in these terms.

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