

# Career pattern of higher civil servants in Belgium<sup>(1)</sup>

by R. DEPRE

Lecturer Faculty of Social Sciences and Management Development Center  
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven



This article on the career of higher civil servants in Belgium is part of a study on the higher civil service as a profession. The frame of reference is the classical one, normally used by sociologists in studying professional groups (2).

The empirical study of a leading stratum includes essentially five aspects : what is the social origin and way of recruitment ; what are the qualities which seem to assure success ; what are the specific career patterns ; what is the way of thinking and the way of life, characteristic to this category ; what is the coherence and consciousness of solidarity among the members of this stratum (3).

W. Zapf, using this frame of reference, adapted and completed it into a systematic set of variables. Especially a sixth aspect was important to him : i.e. succession rate of top executives, revealing the importance of mobility and continuity of leaders of the political and administrative system (4).

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(1) This article is a chapter of the author's doctoral dissertation : *De top ambtenaren van de ministeries in België ; een bestuurssociologisch onderzoek* ; presented at the faculty of Social Sciences on the Katholieke Universiteit te Leuven. Promotor was Prof. Dr VAN MECHELEN F.

(2) KELSALL R.K. *Higher Civil Servants in Britain*, London, 1966.

WARNER W.L. et al. *The American Federal Executive*, New Haven, 1963.

JANOWITZ M., *The Professional Soldier ; A Social and Political Portrait*, Glencoe, 1960.

VAN BRAAM A. *Ambtenaren en bureaucratie in Nederland*, Zelst, 1957.

BECKER H.A. *Management als beroep. Kenmerken van de managersgroep in sociologisch perspectief*, 's Gravenhage, 1968.

(3) ARON R. *Social Class, Political Class, Ruling Class* in BENDIX R., LIPSET S., *Class, Status and Power*. New York, Free Press, 1966, pp. 201-210.

(4) ZAPF W. *Wandlungen der Deutschen Elite. Ein Zirkulationsmodell Deutscher Führungsgruppen 1919-1961*. München, R. Piper, 1965, pp. 30-33.

Those variables are not sufficient to situate top civil servants within society. For this purpose one needs an insight in the administrative system and in the relationship between this system and the environment.

A civil servant is not only a citizen just as the others, but in the first place he has to be « an administrator ».

Within a sociological frame of reference such position can be analyzed as part of a permanent process of organizing the government machinery. Rationalization of administration is not only a problem of systematic ordering arrangements of functions and duties, but it is a reaction too against inefficiency and partisan political influence.

This process can best be explored by the bureaucratic model as proposed by Max Weber. The essential characteristics of this model are :

- officials are free but subjected to authority only with respect to their impersonal official obligations ;
- clearly defined hierarchy of offices ;
- selection on the basis of technical qualifications (examination or diplomas) ;
- official are appointed, not elected ;
- the system proposes a career. There is a system of promotion according to seniority or to achievement or both. Promotion is dependent on the judgement of superiors (5).

Merton and others pointed out that a rational bureaucratic organization could be suffocated by rules who became ends in themselves (displacement of goals). Overconformity to rules, and passing the buck, are wellknown dysfunctions to the system (6).

Another shortcoming of the bureaucratic system is the lack of innovation and his seclusion from the environment (7). The fact that the bureaucracy is not sensitive to the environment and very resistant to change, raises the question how it could stay instrumental and at the same time kept off developing power.

Often quoted concepts as bureaucracy, technocracy, expertocracy, meritocracy are the expression of the influence of civil servants in the decision-making process.

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(5) WEBER M. The essentials of bureaucratic organization, in MERTON *et al.* *Reader in Bureaucracy*. Glencoe, 1960, pp. 18-27.

(6) SIMON H.A. and MARCH J. *Organizations*. New York, 1958, pp. 36-46.

MERTON R.K. *Social Theory and Social Structure*. Glencoe, 1963, pp. 195-224.

(7) CROZIER M. *Le phénomène bureaucratique*. Paris, 1963, pp. 237-278.

Because bureaucracy emphasizes technical skills and scientific knowledge it claims a certain degree of autonomy and holds a monopoly of skill and knowledge. But this monopoly of education and specialisation cannot be in itself considered as a monopoly of power.

People with managerial skills are powerful, not because of their skills which makes them irreplaceable but rather because, and to the degree, they have a given educational background and social origin who induce in them a common social philosophy. Thus administrative autonomy is not a matter of skill but of derived power, i.e. of the power delegated to the administration through the organized representation of social groups (8).

Experts and technocrats need the support of the politicians in order to develop power. But also politicians need the technical aid of the bureaucrats. Out of this duality evolves a system of pragmatic policy-making based on mutual dependence and power relations (9).

This is a very important matter in the Belgian political setting. One of the main characteristics of the Belgian political system is the subdivision of political, social and ideological values into separated organized structures called « zuilen » (i.e. pillars).

Once the ideological and social « verzuijing » originates a political one, a problem of balance of power emerges. This leads to a distribution of all subsidies, promotions to top levels in the administration, and all sort of favors, amongst the political organizations (zuilen) (10).

« Governments, wiser than their constituents, have enshrined pluralism in a representation for all recognized interests in every aspect of life affected with a public interest of expenditure from elected local and national political assemblies... (11).

In forming a government all high level administrative promotions have to be allocated among the political parties participating in government. All these higher level functions are part of the power balance and enter into a compromise between the « political zuilen » (12).

Those practices do not fit in with a rational administrative model. It are not always the best not the most competent civil servants who

(8) BENDIX R. Bureaucracy and the Problem of Power, in MERTON R. *et al.* *Reader in bureaucracy*. Glencoe, 1960, p. 131.

(9) This problem of power relations is well explained by CROZIER M. *Le phénomène bureaucratique*, pp. 247 ss.

(10) See HUYSE L. *Passiviteit, pacificatie en verzuijing in de Belgische politiek*. Antwerpen, 1970, pp. 196 e.v.

(11) LORWIN V.R. Belgium, Religion and Language in National Politics quoted by HUYSE L. *Passiviteit, pacificatie en verzuijing in de Belgische politiek*, p. 225.

(12) See VAN HASSEL H. *Politics and Public Servants in Belgium*. *Res Publica*, 1967, vol. IX, pp. 535-552.

are promoted or nominated, but very often those who are politically safe and loyal.

Frustration of higher civil servants is the normal consequence of these procedures. To get promoted they need in the first place political relations and once nominated they have to favor their patronizing party.

This is incompatible with the professional ethics of an independent and neutral civil service.

By neglecting these macro-sociological and political factors and their actual influence on the administrative system, one has constructed in Belgium new ideal systems over and over who never really functioned.

In this article we are looking for how in Belgium, the need for a professional civil service and the need to make the bureaucracy representative for the political, social and ideological environment, emerge from the analysis of the career of the top civil servants. Our inquiry is limited to the top civil servants (Secretary-General - Rank 17, and Director-General - Rank 16) of the ministries.

### **1. The administrative doctrine and career of the civil servant in Belgium.**

The most distinctive characteristic of the administrative doctrine in Belgium is the permanent effort since 1830 to realise a closed administrative system based on the elimination of political patronage and on the neutrality of the civil servant.

Step by step, rules, reglementations and laws have been adopted to this purpose. The masterpiece of all these reforms has been the introduction of the so-called statute Camu in 1937, in which for the first time a systematical and coherent set of rules has been created for recruiting civil servants, and stipulating their rights and duties.

The main characteristics of the statute were :

- Recruitment and selection by examination in order to eliminate all political influences and intrigues.
  - The creation of a kind of civil service commission (The Central Recruitment Office) in charge of the organization of the recruitment of candidates on the basis of formal examinations.
- Promotion to the higher levels of the administration is based on a system of merit-rating. The college of heads of service (*directieraad*) advises the Minister on this matter.

- The civil servant has to be politically neutral. Camu quotes Lord Welby : « The business of a civil servant is to do what he is told », on this subject.
- The career is a closed career system based on recruitment in the lowest level and promotion from within by eliminating outsiders. There is no lateral entry.
- The civil service system is based on the four-class structure which is found in most nations in Western Europe. We are only interested in the first class (first niveau is the official denomination). The civil servants of this niveau are in charge of the general functions of management, policy and specialized advice to ministers. Somehow, it is a kind of Belgian administrative class with about 8 % of the total number of civil servants. This is much higher than in other countries where only 1 à 2 % of all civil servants belongs to the administrative class.

The ranks are :

17 = secretary-general	16 = director-general
15 = inspector-general	14 = first adviser
13 = director	12 = first-engineer
11 = adjunct-director	10 = secretary
	(rank of entry in this class)

Promotion from the second niveau to the first niveau is possible after examinations ; university graduates enter, after examinations, directly in the first niveau as secretary (rank 10).

The secretary function (rank 10) was thought by the author of the statute as to be a high level administrative staff function for young university graduates.

Article 18 of the statute deals with an exception to the principle of the closed career system by allowing outsiders to be appointed to the highest level (15-16-17). In this case government has to prove the special aptitude (scientific, technical or artistic) of the candidate and that there is no valuable candidate with those skills among civil servants.

The Camu statute can be considered as the Belgian « Northcote Trevelyan Report » which established in 1853 the permanent civil service in England.

In spite of all attempts to introduce the closed-career system in Belgium the administration never has been separated from politics.

In almost all Belgian studies and reports it is claimed that civil servants are promoted on the basis of their political affiliation and that

the cabinet of the minister takes all decisions instead of the administrations.

The mostly recommended solution for the civil service problem is always : abolishing the cabinet and depoliticizing the administration by eliminating the political patronage.

It seems to us that the greatest shortcoming of Belgian administrative doctrine has been that the closed bureaucratic model was never questioned. So this model has been taken as a norm and all non-conforming behaviour was considered as deviant.

The bureaucratic reaction to that deviant behaviour was the introduction of new and more stringent regulations, leading to the infernal bureaucratic circle of M. Crozier. This was never conscious however.

The difference between the legal situation and really has always been enormous.

## 2. Analysis of the career of flemish top civil servants (13).

### 2.1. *Motivation of career choice.*

The answers to the question : why did you choose the civil service as profession can be analysed as follows : pure chance : 31 %, getting a job during the economic crisis : 31 % ; getting a stable career : 10 % ; aleatory career possibilities : 14 % ; influenced by family or friends : 14 % and 42 % said that, at the moment of entry, they would have preferred another occupation.

We can reject the hypothesis that civil servants consider their career as a kind of vocation.

### 2.2. *Occupation before entry into the civil service.*

Thirty-four per cent of the top civil servants worked in other organizations before being nominated in one of the ministries.

Only 22 % of the top civil servants worked in business, industry or commerce before becoming a civil servant. The average length of time they worked in other organizations was 40 months.

This means that in Belgium 66 % of the flemish top level civil servants entered directly into a ministry and 78 % directly into a public service (ministry, township, province, magistrature, army, public school...).

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(13) We limited us to the flemish top civil servants of the central administration. This means that governors, diplomats are excluded. The method used to get the information was a mailed questionnaire and the interview. The answer rate was 75 % of the universum.

Following Van Braam 48 % of higher civil servants in Holland were appointed in the public service (14).

Sixty-five per cent of the administrative class in England have not been occupied in other fields. For the promotees this raises to 75 % (15).

In the United States federal service only 13 % of senior staff began their careers within the service. The typical career of the federal executive is to be graduated from a professional school, to practice then a profession and go into the government at rather high level escaping the routinizing influence of white collar bureaucracy (16).

### 2.3. *Average age at the entry in the civil service.*

Since most of the top civil servants entered the civil service without experience or with a very short one in other organizations, they are very young at the moment of entry.

The average age at recruitment is indeed 24 years for university graduates and 20 years for non-graduates. This is related to the school leaving age.

### 2.4. *Average length of service at promotion to the top level.*

It took civil servants on the average 27 years to become director-general (rank 16). This high average is a very strong indicator that there exists a real career system in the Belgian administration. The general assumption that all appointments to the top level are always appointments made from outside the civil service must be rejected.

However, we found a significant difference between the career of university-graduates and non-graduates. Civil servants without a university education were 38 years in service before their appointment in the rank of director-general; the graduates on the other hand are appointed after only 25 years of service.

The age of the university graduates at the moment of the promotion in rank 16 is 49 years and for non-graduates 58 years. Career speed is thus faster for graduates.

### 2.5. *Average age of top level civil servants.*

The average age of the top level civil servants was 58 years in 1970 (57 for the graduates and 60 for the non-graduates). Because the average

(14) VAN BRAAM A. *Ambtenaren en bureaucratie*, op. cit., p. 202.

(15) KELSALL R. *Higher Civil Servants*, op. cit., p. 102.

(16) *The Fulton Report, The Civil Service*, vol. 3 (1), London, 1969, p. 102.  
WARNER A.L. et al. *The American Federal Executive*, p. 156.

age at promotion to top level was 50 years, the top civil servants are on the average 8 years in this position.

Because retirement and resignation before 65 are very rare, we can conclude that the administrative stability is very great.

This is probably one of the main characteristics of Belgian Administration. The civil servants enter at a very young age in the civil service,

TABLE I  
Factors influencing the promotion into top level

Factors	Ideal system		Actual system	
	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
The responsibility to make decisions . . . . .	4,77	1	3,26	12
Qualities of leadership . . . . .	4,66	2	3,44	8
Organizational skills . . . . .	4,56	3	3,22	13
Ability to make your subordinates to performance . . . . .	4,50	4	3,26	10
To have a university degree . . . . .	4,47	5	4,02	3
Human relationskills . . . . .	4,45	6	3,22	13
Personal characteristics as initiative . . . . .	4,38	7	3,17	15
Creativity . . . . .	4,35	8	3,02	17
To achieve common good . . . . .	4,33	9	2,81	18
Discretion and loyalty to the chief . . . . .	4,00	10	3,33	13
Specialized knowlegde . . . . .	3,97	11	3,40	9
Execute correctly given orders . . . . .	3,88	12	3,18	15
The nature of the university degree . . . . .	3,83	13	3,47	6
Flexibility (adapting to all circumstances) . . . . .	3,65	14	3,47	6
Appraisal . . . . .	3,60	15	2,36	21
Publications of books, articles... . . . .	3,47	16	2,63	20
Draw attention of politicians by his knowledge of certain problems . . . . .	2,41	18	3,63	4
Defend with tenacity a taken point of view . . . . .	2,32	19	2,25	23
Connections with cultural associations . . . . .	2,05	20	1,83	26
To be member of the cabinet (personal staff) of the minister . . . . .	1,79	21	4,42	1
Connections with business and industry . . . . .	1,64	22	2,04	26
Pure chance . . . . .	1,44	23	2,72	19
Connections with the political party . . . . .	1,35	24	4,08	2
Connections with trade-unions . . . . .	1,20	25	3,51	5
Family relations . . . . .	1,18	26	2,23	24

without a work experience in other organisations. They stay in one or maximum two departments and get at the top at the age of 50 and stay during 15 years at the top.

## 2.6. Promoting factors.

In order to find out the factors influencing the promotion process we selected 26 possible promotion criteria. In the questionnaire it was asked to indicate on a 5 point scale what their influence could be in two situations ; the actual situation in order to find out their perceptions



of reality ; and in an ideal civil service in order to find out their perception of an ideal promotion system.

The factors who influenced most the promotion into top level positions are those who are indicating a relationship to the political environment : to be a member of the cabinet of the minister, to have connections with a political party or with the trade unions.

Important too is the high score on the factors university graduation, and the field of specialization of graduation.

The most important conclusion is the difference between the actual civil service system and the ideal one, as seen by themselves. Top level civil servants in Belgium expressed also things are going wrong. They mean that much more importance should be given in the promotion to factors as : making decisions, to be a good leader, to be an organizer, motivate his subordinates and less importance to : connections with political parties, industry, trade unions.

The only factor who scored high in both systems (actual and ideal) is the factor education. This is an indication that the Belgian administration follows the general trend of professionalisation and that university training has become an important factor in advancement to top level positions.

An analysis of the personnel handbooks of 11 departments confirms the influence of the university training.

In the eleven departments 81 % of the top level civil servants have a university education. If we do not take in account the department of finance, which drives on promotion from the rank, 90 % of the top level has graduated.

Another constatation is the fact that the relative number of graduates decreases with the position in the administrative hierarchy. In rank 14, we find only 35 % graduates. This rank is in most of the cases the highest position which non-graduates could reach. In rank 10, the begin rank of the first category, there are only 28 % graduates.

This is in contradiction with the objectives of the statute since the rank 10 has been seen by Camu as reserved for young graduates.

Another characteristic of the Belgian civil service is the fact that it does not follow the British civil service and the German tradition by reserving the higher positions for only a specific scientific discipline as there are law, classics or humanities.

The disciplinary background of graduates which is set out in table II... shows a significant shift since 1925.

Although in 1925 most of the top functions were occupied by masters in law, there however were some other specialists in specific departments.

It was a tradition in Belgium to put a specialist in top of specialized departments : engineers in public works ; physicians in public health ;

agronomists in agriculture. The disciplinary distribution of the top level administrators has followed the general evolution of our society. We find this in the growing part of social scientists and economists in top administration and in the decreasing part of masters in law.

The strong correlation between university education and promotion to the top level could raise the question if by limiting the top levels to graduate of universities one did not restrict the access to top levels to the social and economic groups which could afford a university education.

By analyzing the social origin of Belgian civil servants, we found that the Belgian civil service is one of the most democratized in Europe.

TABLE II  
Top level civil servants (rank 17 and 16 ) by disciplinary background  
in 1925, 1939 and 1970

	1925	1939	1970
Philosophy . . . . .	2 %	6 %	5 %
Law . . . . .	60 %	45 %	30 %
Social-sciences-economics . . . . .	—	9 %	20 %
Agriculture . . . . .	8 %	7,5 %	10 %
Medecine . . . . .	2 %	7,5 %	8 %
Engineers . . . . .	28 %	25 %	22 %
Sciences . . . . .	—	—	4 %

Only 33 % of top civil servants are from the higher class (professions, managers, higher executives), against 60 % in France ; 40 % in Germany, 45 % in Great Britain and 27 % in Holland.

When we calculated the percentage of top civil servants, whose fathers were skilled or unskilled manual workers, we found for Belgium 11 %, against 3,3 % in France, 4 % in Germany and 6 % in Holland.

Even in Belgium an under-representation of the working class has been found, but not in the same degree as in other countries. All top civil servants, sons of workers, had a university diploma. This is probably the reason why we did not find a correlation between social origin and speed of advancement. Sons of workers are moving up at the same speed as the others.

We should conclude that sons of workers, who want to reach the top levels, have to be university graduates.

This is only true for the higher civil servants of the ministries. In one Instanzen der Macht zu suchen sind sagt er nicht. Er glaubt zwar, dass only 41 % of the top level civil servants (the town clerk) graduated from university.

### 3. Analysis of the career of all the civil servants by ministry.

In order to guarantee the anonymity of our inquiry of the Flemish top level civil servants, we did not make an analysis by ministry. By limiting our analyses more over to the top level, we missed an insight in the career of low level higher civil servants (first category rank 10-15). Since a career system can be analyzed as a succession of appointments to different hierarchic positions, once started at the lowest, four variables will be sufficient to describe this career system, i.e.

- average age at every hierarchic level ;
- average length of service at appointment to that level ;
- average length of service in any given level ;
- average age at which appointments are made to each level.

Out of our analysis of this four career variables for the first category we constructed the following tables (17).

The average age increases with the rank what seems to be normal in a career system. We found 44 years in rank 10, 49 in rank 11, 53 in rank 13 and 56, 55, 57 for respectively rank 14, 15, 16. The high average age of the starting rank (10) is very remarkable since this rank has been established as we have seen in 1939 with the only purpose to attract young and dynamic university graduates.

This rank has been peopled by civil servants who were promoted from the second category into the first one. This happened after the second war under the pression of the trade unions and the political parties. The idea of promotion from the ranks has caused an inflation of the Belgian administrative class (8) and has in fact transformed part of the administrative class into an executive class.

The average age at appointment to any given level gives an idea of the promotion speed.

Up to rank 13, we find clear evidence of a career system ; 38 years at rank 10, 42 at rank 11, 47 at rank 12, 46 at rank 13 and 50, 47, 49 respectively at rank 14, 15, 16. The difference between rank 13 and 16 is only 3 years while the high age at appointment to rank 10, points to a process of internal promotion.

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(17) By comparing the results of this analysis with those on the Flemish top level civil servants, we must remember that the figures for the 14 ministries include the governors, the diplomats, the civil servants of some specific agencies as the « plan-bureau », while in the analysis of the Flemish top level, we limited ourselves to the civil servants in executive functions in the central administration. This analysis is based on the file of the permanent inventory : 8.007 civil servants.

TABLE III  
Average length of service in every rank

Department	rank 16		rank 15		rank 14		rank 13		rank 12		rank 11		rank 10	
	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S
Prime Minister	11	6	6	1	9	3	6	3	0	0	4	1	5	2
Finance	6	5	6	4	2	2	4	3	5	4	8	8	4	2
Foreign Affairs	8	6	10	9	2	0	7	3	0	0	7	4	7	4
Justice	12	5	10	8	11	3	10	10	0	0	7	6	9	7
Agriculture	10	4	7	5	0	0	8	5	0	0	7	5	13	8
Labour	6	4	5	2	1	0	5	3	6	0	4	4	8	5
Economic Affairs	10	8	8	4	6	7	10	8	11	5	7	6	8	6
Transport	10	7	8	4	0	0	7	5	5	4	5	4	6	5
Public Works	9	7	11	8	5	0	9	6	7	1	5	4	10	11
Public Health	5	4	7	5	2	2	6	5	6	0	4	6	9	7
Small Business	8	5	5	1	0	0	9	3	0	0	9	3	8	5
Social Security	12	3	7	3	0	0	6	4	11	0	4	5	6	4
Education	5	5	7	5	0	0	7	4	0	0	5	4	6	4
Interior	14	9	8	6	13	12	7	4	0	0	6	4	9	6
Average for all departments	9	7	8	7	7	8	7	5	6	5	7	7	7	6

M : Mean.

S : Standard Deviation.

TABLE IV

## Average age at appointment to each rank

Department	rank 16		rank 15		rank 14		rank 13		rank 12		rank 11		rank 10	
	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S
Prime Minister	46	8	48	6	47	5	47	7	0	0	42	7	40	8
Finance	53	7	49	6	57	5	52	9	48	6	41	7	41	7
Foreign Affairs	56	6	45	9	47	2	41	4	0	0	41	6	37	6
Justice	48	3	45	3	47	3	46	13	0	0	45	8	40	8
Agriculture	47	4	48	6	0	0	46	6	0	0	45	7	34	7
Labour	54	6	49	7	43	3	46	7	42	5	43	9	38	7
Economic Affairs	48	8	48	7	52	7	45	6	39	7	42	8	37	8
Transport	50	8	44	5	0	0	45	7	45	7	42	6	38	9
Public Works	50	6	45	8	49	0	42	7	38	6	40	9	37	9
Public Health	53	6	49	5	45	4	48	7	47	3	45	8	36	8
Small Business	43	4	50	5	0	0	41	5	0	0	42	6	37	6
Social Security	45	7	47	5	0	0	47	6	52	0	46	7	39	8
Education	48	5	46	6	0	0	44	6	0	0	41	7	38	6
Interior	43	7	48	8	41	13	47	7	0	0	46	8	38	7
Average for all departments	49	7	47	8	50	11	46	8	47	7	42	8	38	8

M : Mean.

S : Standard Deviation.

TABLE V  
Average length of service at appointment to each rank

Department	Rank 16		Rank 15		Rank 14		Rank 13		Rank 12		Rank 11		Rank 10	
	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S
Prime Minister	23	10	20	8	21	9	21	9	0	0	17	9	14	10
Finance	33	10	27	9	38	6	31	12	29	6	21	8	20	8
Foreign Affairs	27	4	18	5	24	5	14	4	0	0	12	7	8	7
Justice	20	7	11	8	23	4	22	14	0	0	20	10	9	10
Agriculture	22	3	21	10	0	0	18	7	0	0	17	7	4	6
Labour	30	8	22	13	5	8	20	7	14	2	18	10	11	9
Economic Affairs	17	10	25	7	24	7	19	7	13	7	16	8	10	9
Transport	26	11	21	8	0	0	20	7	19	8	16	9	13	10
Public Works	22	6	19	8	21	0	18	7	12	6	14	8	13	9
Public Health	26	5	21	8	18	13	21	8	25	8	20	9	6	8
Small Business	13	1	24	6	0	0	16	7	0	0	14	5	9	8
Social Security	21	9	22	66	0	0	20	8	28	0	21	9	12	11
Education	14	10	13	8	0	0	16	8	0	0	10	9	8	8
Interior	13	10	19	11	9	16	19	10	0	0	21	9	13	8
Average for all departments	21	11	21	9	25	16	21	11	28	8	20	8	13	10

M : Mean.

S : Standard Deviation.

TABLE VI

Average age of civil servants in 1970 by rank

Department	Rank 16		Rank 15		Rank 14		Rank 13		Rank 12		Rank 11		Rank 10	
	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S
Prime Minister	57	5	54	6	56	5	53	8	0	0	46	6	41	10
Finance	59	5	55	6	59	5	55	9	53	7	49	8	45	
Foreign Affairs	64	1	55	5	49	2	49	5	0	0	48	8	43	7
Justice	60	3	55	5	58	3	55	7	21	0	53	7	47	11
Agriculture	57	5	54	7	0	0	53	6	0	0	52	8	46	10
Labour	60	5	54	6	44	3	52	6	48	5	47	10	42	10
Economic affairs	54	9	55	6	52	10	54	8	50	6	49	8	45	10
Transport	60	2	52	5	0	0	52	7	50	9	47	8	43	9
Public works	58	5	56	6	54	0	52	7	46	7	46	8	40	13
Public Health	57	5	56	6	49	3	54	7	53	3	49	6	43	11
Small Business	50	8	55	7	0	0	51	6	0	0	51	5	45	7
Social Security	56	6	54	7	0	0	53	7	63	0	50	6	44	9
Education	54	5	52	6	0	0	51	6	0	0	45	8	41	9
Interior	58	9	56	6	54	7	53	7	0	0	52	8	47	10
Average for all departments	57	7	55	6	56	7	52	8	53	7	49	8	44	10

M : Mean.

S : Standard Deviation.

In the average length of service at appointment, we find the strongest evidence for the career system. Before attaining the rank of director (the lowest managerial function) the average length of service is 21 years. The fact that the average length of service is also about 21 years above rank 13 could be an indication that the career system finishes at rank 13.

The deviation around the mean is very important also. The standard deviation is about half of the mean itself. This does not indicate, as sometimes might be contended, that all top civil servants were outsiders to the organization (lateral entry).

To investigate this phenomenon, we calculated the percentage of all civil servants in each rank having less than five years average length of service at appointment to the present rank.

We found : rank 17 : 42 % governors included  
 10 % governors excluded  
 rank 16 : 7 %  
 15 : 5 %  
 14 : 3 %  
 13 : 4 %  
 12 : 4 %

If we do not take into account the province governors and the arrondissementscommissarissen (who in fact are political officers), we could conclude that, in the average, only 5 % of appointees have an average length of service less than five years. In spite of political influences on appointments, there exists a very marked career system in Belgium.

The average number of years of service in a rank gives an idea on the administrative stability. This seems to be very great in Belgium as top civil servants have an average time of service in their rank of nine years.

This administrative stability is in sharp contrast to the political instability. Between 1918 and 1940 Belgium had 18 governments and 18 different ministers of interior affairs. Between 1944 and 1961 there were 13 governments and 9 ministers of interior affairs.

For a few departments we analyzed the rate of succession of the secretary-generals (topfunction).

In the department of Agriculture, there were 6 secretary-generals between 1930-1970. Between 1904 and 1968 we had four of them in the department of Justice, while four of them managed the department of Foreign Affairs between 1861 and 1940. Economic Affairs has had two of them between 1931 and 1970 and perhaps most striking, the department of Finance has had only 19 secretary-generals but 70 ministers between 1831 and 1970.



In the department of the interior, there were 6 secretary-generals against 31 ministers from 1920 to 1970.

We may emphasize that the administrative stability is one of the most important characteristics of an administrative career in the ministries.

On the one hand evolution of Belgian public service is characterized by a trend toward neutrality and specialization as a reaction against patronage, aiming to attract skills and knowledge.

On the other hand Belgian pluralism permanently cries for representative bureaucracy and pushes toward deviation from neutralism and depolitization in order to protect the resp. positions of the « zuilen ».

This duality is emerging from the studied career patterns. As in every neutral and permanent civil service, there exists :

1. An outspoken careersystem with an early entry, no former experience elsewhere, late promotion to the top and, except for rank 17, no outsiders nominated.

2. An outspoken academic qualified and specialized top-level.

3. Permanent attempts to promote deviations to the system.

4. Administrative stability expressed in top civil servants remaining as much as 15 years in the same function.

Characteristics of representative bureaucracy are also rescaled in the Belgian system :

1. Political nominations through connections with politicians and parties.

2. Ministerial cabinets composed of civil servants and outsiders belonging to the same party to which the minister belongs.

3. The open character of civil service for which pleads the fact that flemish top civil servants in Belgium are democratic by family origin, notwithstanding the fact that 80 % of Belgian civil servants are university graduates.

4. This openness appears also in the fact that civil service is not monopolized by one profession or scientific discipline. Civil service is in fact specialized, the top included. There are physicians at the top of Public Health, engineers in the Public Works and Transportation Department and economists in the Ministry of Economy.

5. Local administration is even more democratic by the origin of their officials.

These conclusions lead to the question whether it makes sense to keep fighting the representative character of bureaucracy. The only way to make representative a bureaucracy with high stability in its careers, the top included, is to politicize it.

