

# The triangle of bureaucratic policy analysis and the professional types of high-level civil servants: Empirical evidence from Southern Europe

Gilberto Capano<sup>1</sup>  | Alice Cavalieri<sup>2</sup>  | Andrea Pritoni<sup>3</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy

<sup>2</sup>Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Trieste, Trieste, Italy

<sup>3</sup>Department of Arts, University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy

## Correspondence

Gilberto Capano, Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy.

Email: [gilberto.capano@unibo.it](mailto:gilberto.capano@unibo.it)

## Funding information

Ministry of Higher Education—Italy

## Abstract

Despite the growing interest in the policy work and analytical capacities of bureaucracies, these dimensions have not been treated as central to characterizing and understanding the role of senior civil servants in policymaking, which is usually conceptualized in terms of their relationship with policymakers or other organizational and societal factors. This article fills this gap by proposing an analytical framework that allows the empirical classification of high-level civil servants according to the “triangle of bureaucratic policy analysis”, which consists of possible links between their policy work, their policy analytical capacities, and the types of information they use. We apply this analytical lens to the results of a large survey of approximately 1000 senior civil servants in Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. Our findings consist of three empirical professional types of top bureaucrats, the “political generalist”, the “manager”, and the “legal advisor”, each characterized by a particular combination of specific policy analytical capacities, sources and types of information used, and policy work. The proposed framework thus offers a promising conceptual lens for comparative research and demonstrates how a focus on the policy dimensions of high-level officials' activities can provide a novel perspective on their roles.

## KEYWORDS

empirical types of bureaucrats, policy analytical capacities, policy work, Southern Europe, survey analysis

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

© 2024 The Author(s). *Policy Studies Journal* published by Wiley Periodicals LLC on behalf of Policy Studies Organization.

## INTRODUCTION

An increasing number of studies in public policy and public administration have focused on policy work and the policymaking capacities of public administration; studies have also investigated the ways through which policy advice is gathered and channeled to policymakers. This focus allows for the conceptualization of bureaucrats as policy workers and thus as pivotal actors in policymaking (Colebatch, 2006; Colebatch et al., 2010; Veselý, 2017). Furthermore, this focus allows for a better understanding of the capacities of bureaucracies and their competencies and skills, which are essential for them to help shape the different dimensions of policies (Parrado, 2014; Wollmann, 1989). Finally, the focus on policy advice constitutes a way to determine whether and how, in cases in which public administrations are investigated, bureaucracies rely on specific types of knowledge and information to fulfill their expected roles (Howlett et al., 2017; Koga et al., 2022).

This literature, however, still proceeds in a fragmented way and without a significant comparative basis that would allow for generalizations, as well as without any analytical framework that could be the basis for comparative research, about the ways in which policy analysis and its various components are embedded in public bureaucracies and about whether recurrent patterns that link policy work, policy analytical capacities, and the types of information used possibly emerge. Furthermore, this literature tends to focus on the lower ranking of public administration or middle managers, whereas it is less systematic regarding high-level civil servants, although there are some notable exceptions (see, e.g., Hammerschmid, 2015; Hammerschmid et al., 2016; Hood & Lodge, 2006).

Finally, this literature does not develop its full potential in terms of how the lens of policy analysis might open the door to theorizing differently about the professional role(s) of senior bureaucrats, usually framed by their relationship with politicians (Aberbach et al., 1981; Niskanen, 1975) or other organizational or cultural factors (i.e., ideology, career patterns, functional specialization, technical roles, etc.).

In this paper, we fill these gaps by focusing on the possible links between these three dimensions (policy work, policy analytical capacity, and information used) and suggest that they may form a “triangle of bureaucratic policy analysis” through which policy analysis is embedded in the activities of public administrations and, according to its different configurations, shapes specific professional types of high-level bureaucrats.

In doing so, we also go beyond the existing policy research that argues for looking at the context and what bureaucrats do as a means of understanding how bureaucrats analyze policy (Hassenteufel & Zittoun, 2017; Howlett & Lindquist, 2004; Mayer et al., 2001; Newman et al., 2022) by suggesting that by linking what senior officials do (in terms of policy work) to their analytical capacities and the information they seek, it is possible to conceptualize in a novel way how to empirically assess the actual role that senior officials can play in policymaking. Thus, this triangulation allows us to provide an empirically based answer to the question of “how to better conceptualize the professional role of civil servants in the policy process”.

This triangle perspective is applied to analyze, through Exploratory Factor Analysis and Principal Component Analysis, the results of a large survey of top bureaucrats in the central public administrations of Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain.

The empirical analysis reveals three consistent professional empirical types of high-level bureaucratic roles: the political generalist, the legal advisor, and the manager. These empirical types are not only detectors of the ways in which the top bureaucracy performs policy analysis in these countries but also show how the analytical framework we propose can be taken as a starting point for broader comparative analyses and generalizations about the premises (professional roles) of real patterns of bureaucratic behavior in policymaking.

The paper is structured as follows: Section “[Literature Review and Analytical Framework](#)” presents the literature review as well as the analytical framework. Section “[Research Design](#)” presents the research design and the adopted methods. Empirical findings are presented in Section “[Results: Empirical Professional Types of High-Level Civil Servants in Southern Europe](#)” and then discussed in Section

“Discussion of the Findings”, while Section “Conclusion and Lines for Further Research” concludes the paper and suggests some further lines of inquiry.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

### Bureaucrats and policy analysis: Policy advice, policy work, and policy analytical capacities

Policy analysis constitutes a specific way to define what happens in policymaking in terms of those activities, methods, and techniques that are developed and applied to provide information and support empirical evidence to design policy decisions (Weimer & Vining, 1999). In recent decades, policy scholars have devoted increasing attention to three main concepts to grasp the role of policy analysis in administrative behavior: policy advice, policy work, and policy (analytical) capacities.

The focus on policy advice has paved the way for an interesting stream of literature devoted to the structural and institutional characteristics pertinent to the production and use of policy advice in political systems (Craft & Wilder, 2017; Howlett, 2019). However, the bulk of this literature has fallen short in its grasp of all the knowledge-based activities used by public administrations in policymaking (Maley, 2015; Veselý, 2017). Overall, policy analysis is first and foremost embedded in bureaucratic policymaking, and much of the work of bureaucracies is related either to providing advice to decision-makers or to exercising their different roles in policymaking. These roles explain why we pay specific attention to two concepts: policy work and policy analytical capacities.

The conceptualization of bureaucratic work as policy work provides a more realistic perspective of what bureaucrats do and how they do it based on different dimensions of policy analysis than do other conceptualizations (Colebatch, 2006; Veselý, 2017). In fact, it has generally been recognized that policy analysis does not constitute the competence of specific policy professionals; instead, it is diffused throughout the daily activities of public administrations (Howlett et al., 2017; Howlett & Wellstead, 2011; Veselý et al., 2014; Wellstead et al., 2011). Overall, bureaucracies can perform policy work at any stage of policymaking because they collect and analyze data while policy is being framed, when solutions must be designed and assessed, when decisions must be made, when policies are implemented, and, finally, when these policies are evaluated (Wellstead et al., 2009).

Attention given to the pervasive nature of bureaucratic policy work has pushed scholars to also consider the analytical capacities that public administrations have in performing this work. In fact, the relevance of analytical policy capacity—that is, the ability to generate and/or acquire policy-relevant knowledge to be used in the policymaking process (Adams, 2004; Parrado, 2014; Wollmann, 1989)—is not that new. According to a recent and widely adopted typology of policy capacities, they can be defined as “the set of skills and resources—or competences and capabilities—necessary to perform policy functions” (Wu et al., 2018, p. 3). Skills and competencies can be analytical, operational, or political, whereas resources/capabilities may be embedded at the individual, organizational, or systemic levels. While individual analytical capacities are defined as encompassing the knowledge and skills necessary to collect and analyze the appropriate data and information related to the issue at stake, organizational analytical capacity defines the ability of an organization to acquire and use data and evidence to perform related policy functions. Finally, systemic analytical capacity entails the scope and quality of the systemic (or sectorial) characteristics in terms of data collection and sharing, openness, and regulation of the policy analytical foundations of policymaking.

The individual level is crucial because the stock of analytical capacity at the disposal of a bureaucratic organization mainly depends on the individual characteristics of its civil servants. Although a well-equipped stock of individual analytical capacities clearly does not necessarily contribute to the quality of policy design (Mukherjee & Bali, 2019), these capacities are the basic units of organizational and systemic analytical capacities and represent a fundamental basis for all main policy tasks.

Moreover, the policy analytical capacities of civil servants appear to be (or, better said, should be) linked to their daily policy activities. In other words, we cannot study individual analytical capacities without studying individual policy work, and vice versa (Howlett et al., 2017; Veselý et al., 2014). However, scholars who have attempted to focus on this topic are quite rare, and this type of literature is relatively underdeveloped.

Among the few published studies, the seminal works on Canadian policy workers (Howlett et al., 2017; Howlett & Newman, 2010; Howlett & Walker, 2012; Howlett & Wellstead, 2011, 2012; Wellstead & Stedman, 2010) are probably the most relevant. In this case, scholars conducted wide surveys of policy workers at both the federal and subnational levels to show how policy tasks imply a wide range of activities, including the identification of policy problems, the setting of objectives, the selection of instruments, negotiations with stakeholders, implementation, and public consultations. These studies also demonstrated that policy analytical capacities greatly varied among respondents, particularly in terms of the use of particular analytical techniques (i.e., cost–benefit analysis, financial impact analysis, risk analysis, and focus groups). This type of research was subsequently imitated by other scholars working on different political-administrative systems. Subsequent studies have focused on both the national (or federal) level, as in the case of the Philippines (Saguin et al., 2018), Belgium (Aubin & Brans, 2020), and Brazil (Filguerias et al., 2020; Koga et al., 2022), and the subnational level, as in the case of comparative studies on policy tasks in Australia, Canada, and the Czech Republic (Evans & Vesely, 2014; Veselý et al., 2014).

Overall, the abovementioned studies constituted mainly descriptive works, in which the main element of methodological originality was represented by an empirically driven classification of policy tasks and policy analytical capacities based on the use of factor analyses. For example, Vesely and colleagues (2014, p. 112) reported three main categories of policy work tasks—policy analysis work, evidence-based work, consulting and briefing—whereas, in Canada, policy tasks may be reasonably aggregated into four main components: appraisal, implementation, strategic brokerage, and evaluation (Howlett et al., 2017). A rather similar distinction is also applicable to middle managers in Brazil (Filguerias et al., 2020, p. 12), where policy tasks have been differentiated into relational, analytical/oversight, managerial and administrative tasks or into external coordination, stakeholder management, internal administration, and accountability management (Saguin & Palotti, 2021).

Classifications of policy analytical capacities have been even rarer. To our knowledge, the most systematic tracing of the ways in which different analytical techniques cluster with each other has been attempted by Howlett and colleagues (2017) in their study of Canadian policy workers, who differentiated these capacities as evaluative, sociological, consultative, or mathematical.

Finally, within this literature, an additional dimension of analysis is represented by the types and sources of information bureaucrats use as evidence in their policy work. For example, Koga and colleagues (2022, p. 489) reported that Brazilian civil servants use four main types of information—governmental internal, external gray, external academic, and experiential—while in the Belgian case, the most widespread sources of information are the current regulation or strategic plans, political documents from the minister, newspapers, and scientific articles (Aubin & Brans, 2020, p. 470).

## Policy analysis and types of bureaucrats: An analytical framework

As shown above, scholars have delved into the characteristics of policy analytical capacities, policy work activities, and the types of information utilized by public administrations but have done so *separately*. This growing stream of research is very helpful for understanding how policy analysis is processed in public administration; however, this type of research has developed only in a few countries, and there have been only rare comparisons (often between two countries with different administrative traditions). Furthermore, the majority of this research is focused on Anglo-Saxon countries, and owing to the specific characteristics of their administrative systems, scholars have focused primarily on the policy analysis professionals employed in these public administrations. These types of professionals are less

common in other administrative regimes where in one way or another, bureaucrats are indeed in charge of policy analysis.<sup>1</sup> Finally, the few comparative works mainly focus on comparing the similarities and differences among the various dimensions of policy analysis without resorting to any kind of generalization or typification. Thus, the current state of the art is characterized by significant fragmentation that does not allow the capture of the full analytical potential of a policy analysis perspective on the role of bureaucracy. This fragmentation should, therefore, be recomposed by focusing on the possible theoretical (and empirical) links between the three dimensions of policy analysis (policy work, policy analytical capacity, and information used).

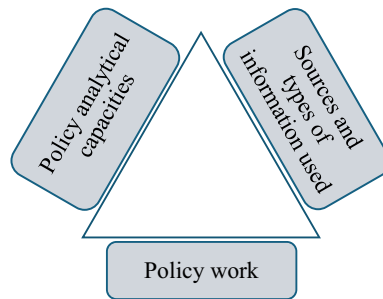
In the literature on policy work and policy analytical capacities, there is also a lack of specific focus on high-level civil servants. This lack of attention runs the risk of underestimating the fact that high-level civil servants can be fully considered policy workers who have specific policy analytical skills and need access to appropriate information, even in those countries, such as most European countries, where there are not formal policy analyst positions (Hammerschmid, 2015; Hammerschmid et al., 2016).

This also represents a serious gap because there is an enormous amount of literature emphasizing that knowledge and expertise are pivotal in characterizing the central role of bureaucracies in policymaking. This pivotal assumption has not changed since Max Weber (1992) stated that the power of bureaucrats rests on knowledge. Bureaucratic expertise encompasses not only detailed knowledge about the rules of administrative conduct, but also (Page, 2010) (a) detailed knowledge about specific policy fields, (b) the details of policy and political dynamics characterizing the different stages of policymaking, (c) the knowledge of the suitable, legitimate, or feasible instruments to be adopted to reach political goals, and (d) the knowledge of specific techniques to support decision-making (such as cost–benefit analysis). These different dimensions of knowledge can be acquired and used in diverse ways by bureaucrats, but there is no doubt that they contribute to understanding what civil servants actually do. Furthermore, these dimensions of knowledge represent an essential source for policy analysis, specifically in terms of assessing the characteristics of issues to be addressed in policy, how these issues can be solved, and how solutions can be implemented. Finally, the composition of bureaucratic knowledge represents the stock of analytical capacities that bureaucracies (both from the individual and the organizational sides) have gained in doing policy work (Page & Jenkins, 2005). From this perspective, top bureaucrats should be seen as pivotal actors in policymaking precisely because, owing to their expertise and analytical capacities, policy analysis is embedded in policymaking.

Thus, the lack of analytical attention to the policy dimensions of the work of high civil servants is a real shortcoming, considering that if it is based on the characteristics of the knowledge of civil servants that bureaucracy can influence policymaking from prescriptive, cognitive, and technical points of view (Nay, 2012), it must be assumed that the characteristics of the policy work of high-level civil servants should be very relevant given their hierarchical position and their functional responsibilities. What top civil servants actually do in terms of policy work has been shown by COCOPS research (Hammerschmid, 2015; Hammerschmid et al., 2016; Steen & Weske, 2016). Indeed, they see themselves not only as managers but also as implementers of rules and laws, developers of new policy agendas, providers of knowledge and expertise, and explorers of new policy solutions (Steen & Weske, 2016, p. 5).

Overall, the main aim of this manuscript is thus to present a valuable analytical framework capable of combining all the previously cited streams of research, overcoming the fragmentation of the literature on the policy analysis dimensions of bureaucratic activity and the lack of a specific analytical focus on high-level civil servants. To this end, we suggest that it is possible to grasp the professional characteristics of high civil servants through the lens of policy analysis and that this perspective is crucial both to understand potential differences in terms of the policymaking role of bureaucrats and to grasp diachronic changes in the whole way of working of public administrations. From this point of view, the focus we propose could be very relevant in order to analyze, concretely, at the micro level, whether and how administrative reforms truly affect the way of working and the professional characteristics of top bureaucracies. Too often, changes in bureaucratic characteristics are deduced from changes in the prevailing bureaucratic paradigm (Peters & Pierre, 2001), without a fine-grained analysis of whether and how macrolevel changes have actually altered bureaucratic behavior and attitudes at the micro level.

We suggest, therefore, that the types of possible professional roles in the policymaking of high civil servants are shaped by the ways in which policy work, analytical skills, and information gathering are interlinked in day-to-day professional activities. This triangulation (see [Figure 1](#)) allows us to assume that it is possible to distinguish different empirical types (Bailey, 1994, 2005) of bureaucratic professional roles according to different configurations of the three components' content and linkages.



**FIGURE 1** Triangle of bureaucratic policy analysis.

The existing typologies and classifications of bureaucrats have traditionally focused on their relationships with politicians (Aberbach et al., 1981; Alesina & Tabellini, 2007, 2008; Niskanen, 1975; Peters, 1989a, 1989b; Peters & Pierre, 2001), motivations (Downs, 1967), social characteristics (Page, 1997), ideology (Hooghe, 2001), and career paths (Barberis, 1996). Here, we suggest that it is possible to find specific professional empirical types that can be assumed to exist autonomously from the relationship between bureaucrats and politicians (which is assumed to be governed by civil service bargaining at the fiduciary level) and other relationships that are assumed to structurally define the characteristics of the role of top bureaucrats by focusing on the way in which the three dimensions of policy analysis considered central in the literature are linked in bureaucratic activities. Owing to the triangle of bureaucratic policy analysis, the potential contribution of senior civil servants to the policy process can depend, first, on the specific configuration of that triangle. To be clear, we are not suggesting that the activity of senior civil servants in policymaking can be independent of their relationship with politicians (Christensen, 2024; Hood & Lodge, 2006), but that it is possible to consider their professional roles as an autonomous precondition for this relationship. Therefore, an essential step for any kind of further analysis is to empirically capture their professional roles (in terms of policy work, analytical capacity, and information resources employed).

Our contribution is inspired by those few proposals that have paid more attention to the policy work that high-level servants do. First, Feldman and Khademian (2007) proposed three perspectives for considering the work of public managers: the political, scientific or technical, and local or experience-based perspectives. This theoretical contribution is interesting because it allows researchers to consider the work of public managers as at least tripartite: they have to coordinate financial and human sources; they have to organize processes and activities (through planning, delegation, restructuring) according to their expertise, owing to which they advise politicians about how to do things; and they have to interact with external stakeholders (at least to obtain information).

Another relevant classification is represented by the empirical types that Howlett and Walker (2012) extracted from a survey focused on obtaining the types of policy work of Canadian policy managers (without specific attention to their capacities and sources of information): researcher analysts, coordinator planners, and director managers. This typology is interesting because it extracts specific functional specializations of policy managers, but its target is multilayered (different jurisdictions) and considers various bureaucratic positions without a clear hierarchical distinction. Thus, again, there is the problem of the lack of attention to the higher managerial ranks. Interestingly, in their analysis, Howlett and Walker show that there are fewer differences than expected in terms of activities and interactions among the three types.

Finally, we should recall the typological effort proposed by Hood and Lodge (2006) in their book, where they analyze the relationship between bureaucrats and politicians as an ongoing negotiation, with bureaucrats having four types of knowledge at their disposal. In their view, bureaucrats may be defined as “sages”, “woks”, “deliverers”, or “brokers”. The “sages” are bureaucrats providing high-level advice on highly relevant policy issues: their policy work is inherently political, characterized by “the ability to evaluate political positions, to identify and assess risks, and to identify heresthetics” (p. 101). The “woks” are in possession of the technical knowledge in a particular field: they are experts either in specific policy areas or in cross-cutting issues (such as law). The “deliverers” are able to make things happen, owing to their managerial skills. “Brokers” act as mediators between different contexts and organizations: they are boundary spanners and are able to link and integrate the administration with interest groups, for example, or internally between different public organizations and agencies. While these types of bureaucratic competencies are considered central in a framework of public service bargaining (see also Christensen, 2024), they are also very interesting from our point of view because they elucidate some specific capacities that bureaucrats can have and thus on different activities that they can perform in policymaking. This classification underscores that bureaucrats perform different activities in the policy process: political, managerial, technical, and relational. This classification, which is based on ideal types, is very promising. However, it does not provide a detailed view of the activities that are carried out and of the specific analytical capacities that bureaucrats should have to carry out their policy work.

Overall, these three typologies show that a significant variety of policy work can be expected by those who lead bureaucratic processes. However, this type of policy work is expected to be performed by top bureaucrats in any system, regardless of its geopolitical location (Newman et al., 2022). Thus, to understand the professional role of senior officials in policymaking, policy work alone is not enough. These typologies, then, are based on specific dimensions that do not comprehensively grasp how the multifaceted world of policy analysis is embedded in the characteristics of high civil servants' behavior and shapes it.

In our view, by adopting the analytical lens of the triangle of bureaucratic policy analysis, it is possible to reveal a more complete understanding of the role of bureaucrats in policymaking than would be possible otherwise. The main idea is that top bureaucrats' professional role in policymaking is significantly shaped by the interaction among their activities, their analytical capacities, and the resources they use for their activities. The way through which this triangulation is structured and composed, then, is a relevant analytical tool to grasp the different professional roles that top bureaucrats can play in the policymaking process.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

On the basis of the proposed framework, we respond to our research question—“how to better conceptualize the professional role of civil servants in the policy process”—by empirically analyzing at the individual level the triangle of bureaucratic policy analysis considering together Greek, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish high-level civil servants working in central administrations. The choice to focus on the four Southern European countries (OSF) is justified not only by the lack of an extensive analysis of bureaucratic policy in these countries but also because these countries are considered very similar in terms of administrative regimes and are each characterized by a deeply rooted legalistic tradition; thus, they are also expected to have a bureaucracy with a main analytical capacity of the legalistic type (Kickert, 2011; Ongaro, 2010a, 2010b). Furthermore, it should be noted that these countries, like many others, do not have specific positions for policy analysts, as do Anglo-Saxon countries, which have been the preferred targets of research on policy work and policy analysis capacity so far. In these countries, therefore, policy analysis is spread across the different levels of the bureaucracy (Aubin & Brans, 2020; Fleischer, 2009; Hammerschmid, 2015; Hammerschmid et al., 2016; Nekola & Kohoutek, 2016), and, as we have already suggested above, the central high-level bureaucracy can be seen as representative of the way in which policy analysis is carried out in national public administration. Finally, these countries,

which are part of the same family of public administrations (namely, the Napoleonic one), have been subject to different waves of reforms in the last three decades that are very similar in terms of content (Capano & Lippi, 2021).

In our view, the significant similarities between these four countries allow us to have a broader empirical basis for our analysis, which is particularly important for the reliability of the empirical types extracted.

In fact, our analysis goes far beyond the description. While our new data are presented in the online supplementary material (OSM, Section C) and discussed elsewhere (Capano et al., 2024), to assess the governance capacities of the four analyzed administrations, in this article, we aim to extract an empirically driven classification for high-level public servants, which can both dialog with empirical studies already conducted (Aubin & Brans, 2020; Filguerias et al., 2020; Howlett et al., 2017; Howlett & Walker, 2012; Koga et al., 2022; Veselý et al., 2014) and represent a reference for future empirical research. This means that the data of the four analyzed countries are used not to compare polities but rather to form a unique sample (due to countries' administrative similarities), with the specific aim of extracting an empirical typology of top bureaucrats in Southern European countries whose empirical basis is the widest possible.<sup>2</sup> To do this, this research pools together all the responses provided by the surveyed individuals with the purpose of deriving a few categories that maximize the internal similarities among each group (Bailey, 2005; Lazarsfeld, 1937). This determination of empirical types can be considered a first step toward a deeper characterization of bureaucratic professional roles from a policy analysis perspective. As is well known, empirical types are intrinsically polythetic, which means that they may contain internal variation because not all cases within a given type are completely identical. However, empirical types allow not only for a reduction in the complexity of treated cases but also for the identification of certain potentially recurrent patterns (Bailey, 1994; Beckner, 1959).

The final sample of respondents to our online survey comprised a total of 1014 individuals (Greece: 116; Italy: 498; Portugal: 81; and Spain: 319), with variations in the response rates across the four countries (Greece: 11.6%; Italy: 26.8%; Portugal: 6.3%; and Spain: 35.3%). Despite the low response rate in several countries, our sample is nonetheless representative of the entire invited population (See OSM, Section A, on this).

To empirically identify the professional types of individual components in our analytical triangle (see Figure 1) of bureaucratic policy analysis in OSF countries, we use two techniques that reduce the complexity of large datasets, with the purpose of finding groups or clusters of variables, that is, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Principal Component Analysis (PCA) (for details about the difference between the two, see OSM, Section B). We used the first to determine whether our measured variables could be grouped into fewer factors, which would, in fact, be those factors that truly explain the variance in our results (Jain & Shandliya, 2013). After uncovering the latent variables, we use the PCA to determine whether they combine within each individual and if some of them are recurrently present together, thus uncovering typical profiles of high-level civil servants. After identifying the empirical professional types of high-level civil servants, we also show how they are distributed within the surveyed population.

## RESULTS: EMPIRICAL PROFESSIONAL TYPES OF HIGH-LEVEL CIVIL SERVANTS IN SOUTHERN EUROPE

### Policy analytical capacity

To assess the policy analytical capacities of the surveyed high-level public servants, EFA was conducted via specific analytical techniques, with the items focused on the degree of familiarity (see Table 1). The EFA cumulatively explains 54% of the total variance and reveals three main factors (after rotation) around which the policy analytical capacities of respondents gather. To decide which variables make up which factors, we look at factor loadings of each dimension, which explains the substantive importance

**TABLE 1** Factor analysis: Policy analytical capacities.

	<b>Economic</b> Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.83$	<b>Eclectic</b> Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.75$	<b>Legal</b> Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.64$
Familiar with financial analysis	<b>0.87</b>	0.06	0.20
Familiar with economic analysis (cost–benefit)	<b>0.78</b>	<b>0.44</b>	0.09
Familiar with statistical analysis	<b>0.49</b>	<b>0.56</b>	0.06
Familiar with analysis of scenario	0.39	<b>0.64</b>	0.24
Familiar with experimental design	0.16	<b>0.58</b>	–0.02
Familiar with analysis of regulation's impact	0.11	<b>0.56</b>	<b>0.52</b>
Familiar with preparation of policy report	0.06	<b>0.46</b>	<b>0.44</b>
Familiar with legal analysis	0.15	0.02	<b>0.76</b>
Familiar with organizational analysis	<b>0.44</b>	0.37	<b>0.53</b>
Familiar with online consultations	0.08	0.34	0.18

Note: Total variance explained: 54%; variance explained by each factor: Economic: 20%; Generalist: 20%; Legal: 14%. Eigenvalues after rotation: 2.02; 2.04; 1.38. Additional tests: KMO: 0.83; Bartlett's test:  $\chi^2 = 4075.31$  ( $df = 45$ ;  $p = 0.00$ ). Salient loadings are in bold ( $> 0.40$ ).

of a given variable to a given factor (Field et al., 2012, p. 767). The values of Cronbach's  $\alpha$  statistic confirm the internal consistency of the factored variables.

The items that cluster on the same factor suggest that Factor 1 identifies a type of high civil servant who is particularly familiar with skills and techniques that focus on economic and financial analysis. This concentration allows us to define this empirical type as a type of “economic analytical capacity”. Factor 3 shows a strong concentration on legal techniques and thus emerges as an empirical type pertaining to “legal policy analytical capacity”. However, the second factor is more challenging. In fact, while the other two are clearly specialized, this component presents high loadings in 6 out of the 10 items. What characterizes this type of analytical capacity is the low score on the two pivotal techniques used for the other two components (financial analysis and legal analysis, respectively), whereas there is a significant score in these very diversified analysis techniques, which suggests that this capacity is the sum of education background and the different skills acquired on the job. For this reason, we label this empirical type “eclectic analytical capacity”.

These findings thus show that high-level civil servants in the OSF have evolved in terms of their analytical capacities with respect to the original type, which corresponds to the continental bureaucratic tradition (based on juridical expertise). Here, while it is not unexpected to see a rise in economic analytical capacity, it might be more surprising to see the emergence of a generalist analytical capacity out of the characteristics of Factor 2, which delineates a new type of generalist top bureaucrat who has various technical skills. This result suggests that the inherited legalistic tradition is no longer necessarily pivotal in terms of bureaucratic expertise.

## Sources and types of information

In the second EFA (Table 2), with 48% of the total variance cumulatively explained, we investigate the sources and types of information used by individuals in our sample. Three factors (after rotation) are extracted. The internal consistency of the factored variables is demonstrated by the values of Cronbach's  $\alpha$  statistic.

Our analysis of the composition of the clusters highlights that Factor 1 is characterized by sources and types of information that show the prevalence of official documents issued by all the relevant institutions at both the national and supranational levels. Thus, we define this type of factor as “institutional information”. Factor 2 is mainly concentrated on quantitative and qualitative empirical data and thus

**TABLE 2** Factor analysis: Sources and types of information.

	<b>Institutional information Cronbach's <math>\alpha = 0.82</math></b>	<b>Evidence-based information Cronbach's <math>\alpha = 0.80</math></b>	<b>Juridical information Cronbach's <math>\alpha = 0.61</math></b>
Frequency of consulting IOs' documents	<b>0.86</b>	0.19	0.05
Frequency of consulting EU's documents	<b>0.73</b>	0.20	0.16
Frequency of consulting National Bank's and authorities' studies	<b>0.50</b>	0.32	0.31
Frequency of consulting info from representative associations	<b>0.44</b>	0.34	0.21
Frequency of consulting parliamentary dossier	<b>0.44</b>	0.16	<b>0.44</b>
Frequency of using statistical data	0.27	<b>0.76</b>	-0.02
Frequency of using monitoring data	0.04	<b>0.74</b>	0.19
Frequency of using results of assessment programs	0.16	<b>0.66</b>	0.21
Frequency of using survey data	0.30	<b>0.51</b>	-0.03
Frequency of using experts' opinion	0.35	<b>0.48</b>	0.20
Frequency of consulting government's documents	<b>0.42</b>	0.18	<b>0.44</b>
Frequency of consulting laws	0.05	0.02	<b>0.68</b>
Frequency of using legal opinions	0.22	0.36	0.39

Note: Total variance explained: 48%; variance explained by each factor: Political: 19%; Evidence-based: 19%; Juridical: 10%. Eigenvalues after rotation: 2.45; 2.52; 1.30. Additional tests: KMO: 0.85; Bartlett's:  $\chi^2 = 5148.31$  ( $df = 78$ ;  $p = 0.00$ ). Salient loadings are in bold ( $>0.40$ ).

can be defined as “evidence-based information”, whereas Factor 3 is clearly concentrated on legal and legislative information, thus justifying its definition as “juridical information”. Within this tripartition, Factor 1 (institutional) stands out. Hence, high civil servants collect not only factual, quantitative, and juridical information but also all the information pertaining to different institutional and societal worlds (from government to parliament, from supranational institutions to interest groups), which allows them to have broad and deep knowledge about the ideas and preferences of the different relevant policy actors.

## Policy work

Finally, the last EFA again identified three factors (after rotation) related to the policy work of the respondents. The analysis cumulatively explained 42% of the total variance. Factored variables are internally consistent, as proven by values of Cronbach's  $\alpha$  statistic (Table 3).

Factor 1 clearly shows the prevalence of activities that, in conjunction, are essential to drive the activities of a ministry (thus, we call it “steering”). This factor represents the typical high-level bureaucratic work that is conducted to coordinate the activities of the administration, to interact not only with political actors (the minister in charge and the MPs) but also with other administrations and to design the general guidelines for the overall activities of the ministries. Factor 2 connects those items that are essential for the work to be realized and thus for bureaucrats to make proper decisions according to general guidelines; these activities clearly show the prevalence of managerial content in policy work

**TABLE 3** Factor analysis: Policy work.

	Steering Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.79$	Managing Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.77$	Advising Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.75$
How often meet the head of the administration	<b>0.67</b>	0.18	0.05
How often help the political head in his or her relations with the legislature	<b>0.63</b>	0.12	0.26
How often meet parliamentarians or member of parties	<b>0.60</b>	0.11	0.14
How often meet EU officials or NGOs	<b>0.55</b>	0.14	0.02
How often give info and data to support programs	<b>0.46</b>	0.28	0.31
Activity: Identify political administrative course	<b>0.42</b>	<b>0.45</b>	0.12
Activity: Decide line of action to adopt	0.20	<b>0.79</b>	0.11
Activity: Define possible options	0.23	<b>0.70</b>	0.19
Activity: Implementation and managing of programs	0.08	<b>0.51</b>	0.14
Activity: Monitor and assessment of administration's programs	0.14	<b>0.48</b>	0.15
How often examine legitimacy of alternatives	0.05	0.19	<b>0.80</b>
How often examine feasibility of different options for public intervention	0.33	0.33	<b>0.53</b>
How often hypothesize political risks connected to each of the alternatives	<b>0.45</b>	0.18	<b>0.52</b>
How often meet the managers of other administrations	0.38	0.20	0.24
How often give opinions on the financial aspect of the administration programs	0.36	0.31	0.30
How often meet stakeholders	0.33	0.22	0.23

Note: Total variance explained: 42%; variance explained by each factor: Steering: 17%; Managing: 14%; Advising: 11%. Eigenvalues after rotation: 2.70; 2.31; 1.69. Additional tests: KMO: 0.87; Bartlett's:  $\chi^2 = 5565.76$  (df = 120;  $p = 0.00$ ). Salient loadings are in bold ( $> 0.40$ ).

(thus, we call it “managing”). Finally, Factor 3 visibly extracts the advising dimension of policy work (thus, we call it “advising”).

## Empirical types of professional bureaucratic roles

The next essential step in our analysis is to further reduce complexity and uncover the main features of (potential) typical profiles of high-level civil servants. To do this, we used a PCA (see OSM, Section B, for details on that). Table 4 shows the extent to which the nine empirical types of policy analytical capacities, types/sources of information, and policy work contribute to identifying comprehensive empirical professional types of Southern European high-level civil servants based on factor score estimates.

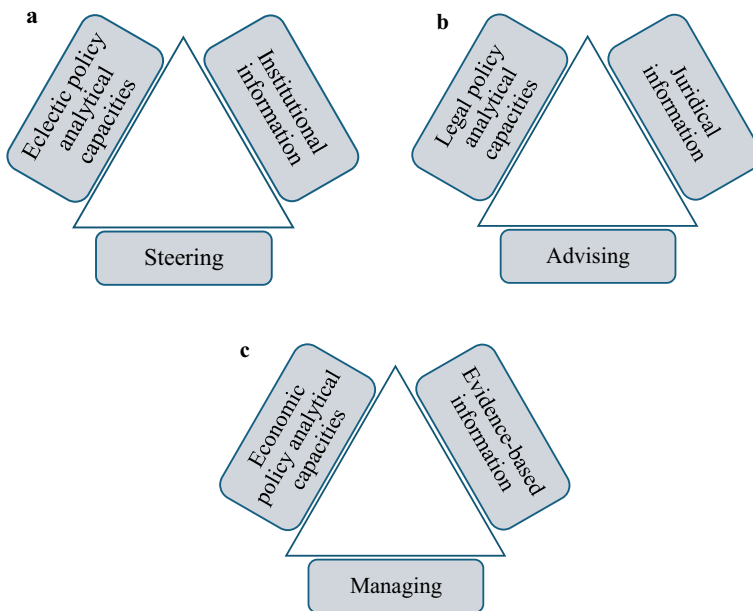
The picture offered in Table 4 shows that it is possible to extract three consistent empirical professional types of Southern European high-level civil servants. These empirical types, by presenting different compositions in the triangulation of the three dimensions theorized above (Figure 1), are pivotal for understanding how policy analysis is embedded in the behaviors of bureaucrats and shapes their roles. The three emerging empirical types are presented in Figure 2a–c.

Type 1 offers the most expected steering role for Southern European high civil servants, representing what can be considered the traditional “political” role of top bureaucrats, who constantly act as coordinators in government policy or intermediaries with interest groups (Feldman & Khademan, 2007; Page & Wright, 1999).

**TABLE 4** Principal component analysis: Policy work, sources and types of information, and policy analytical capacities.

	<b>Political generalist</b> Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.69$	<b>Legal advisor</b> Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.63$	<b>Manager</b> Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.44$
Policy work: Steering	<b>0.83</b>	0.10	0.02
Policy work: Managing	0.03	0.08	<b>0.63</b>
Policy work: Advising	0.02	<b>0.63</b>	0.12
Information: Institutional	<b>0.75</b>	0.11	-0.12
Information: Evidence-based	0.35	-0.03	<b>0.68</b>
Information: Juridical	-0.05	<b>0.85</b>	0.03
Policy analytical capacities: Economic	-0.14	0.06	<b>0.70</b>
Policy analytical capacities: Eclectic	<b>0.74</b>	-0.16	0.25
Policy analytical capacities: Legal	0.09	<b>0.76</b>	-0.03

Note: Total variance explained: 57%; variance explained by each factor: Political generalist: 22%; Legal advisor: 21%; Manager: 16%. Eigenvalues after rotation: 1.95; 1.77; 1.45. Additional tests: KMO: 0.55; Bartlett's test:  $\chi^2 = 1268.619$  (df= 36;  $p = 0.00$ ). Salient loadings are in bold (>0.40).



**FIGURE 2** (a) Empirical types of high-level civil servants in Southern Europe: Type 1 (political generalist). (b) Empirical types of high-level civil servants in Southern Europe: Type 2 (legal advisor). (c) Empirical types of high-level civil servants in Southern Europe: Type 3 (manager).

It is not a case that they have eclectic analytical capacities, meaning that they not only have initial technical skills (acquired through their academic training), but also have acquired other analytical capacities through their professional experience. We can therefore assume that this type of top bureaucrat also possesses what Hood and Lodge (2006) define as boundary spanning, namely, “the ability to straddle and bring together ‘worlds’, acting as mediator, broker, spy, diplomat or go-between”

(p. 96), as well as the sage man's ability to assess political risk and identify political-administrative courses (p. 101).

Regarding these skills, it emerges (Table 3) that competence in legal analysis is not relevant at all, precisely because the role of these high civil servants is to be pivotal actors in policymaking, whereas juridical input/advice depends on other sources. Moreover, the range of policy analysis skills is very broad and is an indication of how the political role of top bureaucrats has evolved over time. It appears that steering activities imply the possession of a greater variety of analytical skills than traditional skills do (all the countries analyzed belong to a legalistic bureaucratic tradition). It is, therefore, not the case that this type of top bureaucrat usually consults a very diverse set of information, which allows them to obtain information about the positions of all the other main actors in policymaking, whether institutional or not. Indeed, Type 1 emerges as a contemporary representation of what can be considered generalist top bureaucrats, who are in charge of “cross-cutting issues and meta-policies” (Jann & Wegrich, 2019, p. 846) and are thus characterized by flexibility in their analytical perspective (Peters & Pierre, 2015). Thus, we label Type 1 “political generalist”.

Type 2 represents a typical role of top bureaucrats, who act as “legal advisors” throughout the policymaking process. This type shows the persistence of the juridical perspective as pivotal in shaping the institutionalized function of advising. All in all, the countries from which we have gathered the data belong to the continental administrative tradition and thus to a history in which law is pivotal in the evolution and action of the state.

Finally, Type 3 shows a pattern of behavior that is typically managerial. This type indicates that an economic and empirically driven perspective prevails in accomplishing results. Moreover, this is a partially unexpected type because it appears to clash with the traditional idea that, in the analyzed administrations, the operative side of the bureaucratic role in policymaking should still be driven by a juridical perspective. In contrast, our analysis shows that, at least in terms of the perceptions and beliefs of the surveyed bureaucrats, practices have changed (which could also be considered an effect of three decades of NPM reforms in the four countries). Obviously, a deeper and contextualized analysis is needed to verify whether and how this more empirically oriented manner of working is truly effective or, eventually, if it should be interpreted according to a persisting juridical perspective (Capano, 2003; Ongaro, 2010a). In any case, we label Type 3 “manager”.<sup>3</sup>

As can be concluded from the results in Tables 1–4, actual individuals/respondents often have blurred characteristics and tasks that do not clearly belong to a single empirical type. However, Tables 5–7 reveal that approximately 18% of Southern European top bureaucrats *perfectly* fit into a single, consistent, empirical type with very well-defined characteristics. More precisely, considering the same 18% of individuals who neatly belong to one of the three empirical types, 39.4% of them are political generalists (Type 1), 37.5% of them are legal advisors (Type 2), and 23.1% of them are managers (Type 3).

Even though, as is always the case with this type of analysis, the vast majority of individuals do not perfectly resemble any “pure” empirical type, an additional 67% of individuals have very close characteristics to one of the four pure empirical professional types, whereas only approximately 15% of respondents are not related to any of them. The “quasitypes” share with the “pure” types two out of three characteristics, and interestingly, many of them differ only in that they have eclectic political capacities rather than well-defined economic or legal ones. This moves the quasitypes and pure types even closer, as we may suppose that the former developed “eclectic” analytical capacities because of political dynamics or the ministry they work at rather than because of their actual skills.

**TABLE 5** Distribution of respondents on the basis of their prevalent factor scores.

Policy analytical capacities	<i>N</i>	Percentage (%)
Eclectic	321	36.9
Economic	290	33.3
Legal	259	29.8
Total	870	100.0
Information used	<i>N</i>	%
Institutional	281	32.3
Evidence-based	298	34.3
Juridical	291	33.4
Total	870	100.0
Policy work	<i>N</i>	%
Steering	289	33.2
Managing	288	33.1
Advising	293	33.7
Total	870	100.0

**TABLE 6** Distribution of respondents according to different combinations of characteristics.

	Eclectic			Economic			Legal		
	Instit.	Evid.	Jurid.	Instit.	Evid.	Jurid.	Instit.	Evid.	Jurid.
Steer.	<b>Type 1</b> <b>63</b>	Quasi 1 60	Quasi 1 15	Quasi 1 30	Quasi 3 29	Hybrid 18	Quasi 1 22	Hybrid 15	Quasi 2 37
Manag.	Quasi 1 44	Quasi 3 42	Hybrid 17	Quasi 3 29	<b>Type 3</b> <b>37</b>	Quasi 3 38	Hybrid 19	Quasi 3 21	Quasi 2 41
Advis.	Quasi 1 26	Hybrid 37	Quasi 2 17	Hybrid 26	Quasi 3 35	Quasi 2 48	Quasi 2 22	Quasi 2 22	<b>Type 2</b> <b>60</b>

**TABLE 7** Distribution of respondents among “pure” and “quasi” empirical types.

Empirical types	<i>N</i>	Percentage (%)	TOT %
Type 1: Political generalist	63	7.2	29.9
Quasi type 1	197	22.6	
Type 2: Legal advisor	60	6.9	28.4
Quasi type 2	187	21.5	
Type 3: Manager	37	4.3	26.6
Quasi type 3	194	22.3	
None (hybrid)	132	15.2	15.2

## DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The latent evidence emerging from our analysis is compelling and promising both empirically and theoretically. From an empirical point of view, a focus on the triangle of bureaucratic policy analysis can be

fruitful in unpacking and obtaining information about its content. From a policy perspective, our analysis has also unpacked the constitutive dimensions of top bureaucrats' professional behavior patterns and has shown very promising answers to our research question, which is how to better conceptualize the professional role of civil servants in the policy process.

The nine extracted empirical types of policy work, policy analytical capacities and types of information can benefit various streams of research interested in both the skills and competencies of the top bureaucracy. Taken together, these nine types, while not innovative, offer a fresh perspective on the four analyzed national bureaucracies. With respect to policy work, the three empirical types (steering, managing, and advising) confirm what much of the literature has underlined about the possible policy work realized by bureaucracies (Feldman & Khademian, 2007; Howlett & Walker, 2012; Page, 2010; Page & Jenkins, 2005). However, it is interesting to see here how these three types of policy work are characterized empirically and, above all, how they are intrinsically connected and, in one way or another, specified by the analytical capacities and the type of information adopted.

In fact, the empirical types pertaining to the other two dimensions suggest that there have been some important changes in the last decades in the four analyzed countries. With respect to policy analytical capacity, it is a surprising and relevant signal of change that the eclectic and economic types of analytical capacity have emerged along with traditional legal capacity. Here, the recurrent waves of reforms could have had an impact (Capano & Lippi, 2021; Ongaro, 2010a, 2010b).

In any case, the fact that traditional legal expertise is clearly paired not only with economic expertise but also with expertise characterized by the acquisition of many techniques of analysis is surely of interest, as demonstrated by the eclectic type. Does this type of policy analytical capacity characterize all those who do not hold a position formally requiring either an economic or legal background? This could be a fascinating hypothesis to test (as a process of internal institutionalization of three different patterns of policy analytical capacities).

The same conclusion emerges in terms of the empirical types of information used. The three patterns are quite clear and confirm that while juridical information is still relevant, it is paired with two different flows of information that are more substantive (institutional and evidence-based).

Among these nine empirical types, we further extract three types of bureaucratic professional roles, showing how combining the three dimensions of bureaucratic policy analysis produces very different types of bureaucrats in terms of policy analysis.

From a theoretical point of view, the adoption of the lens of the triangle of bureaucratic analysis is capable of ordering reality in an innovative way and thus leading to a novel empirically driven conceptualization of different types of policy work, analytical capacities, and types of information as well as to an innovative empirical classification of professional roles that many civil servants can play in policymaking.

The three empirical types of professional roles of high civil servants are surely the most promising aspects of our research. Overall, this result is innovative because it is based on dimensions that have never been considered together (at least in the complete way we have done here).

In fact, the three empirical types show not only how the roles of high civil servants in policymaking are structured (according to the triangle of bureaucratic policy analysis) but also that there is a certain coherence between what top bureaucrats say to do and the analytical and informative resources they say to use in their work. This is an indication that there is a “necessary” logical link between these dimensions, further supporting our proposal not to treat them separately. This promising result, however, calls for more empirical research on the three dimensions of bureaucratic policy activities. Interestingly, not only are the empirical types very variegated in their composition but also, as shown by the distribution of the respondents among the pure and quasipure types, the legal dimension of bureaucratic policy analysis is less intrusive and diffuse among the high civil servants than would have been expected on the basis of the historical roots of the four national central administrations that have been surveyed.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, the three empirical professional types show that the triangle of bureaucratic policy analysis can be a powerful analytical tool for reinterpreting the role that top bureaucrats play in policymaking and better clarifying the dichotomy between generalists and specialists, as it characterizes

analytical perspectives in the field (Jann & Wegrich, 2019). In fact, the three empirical types show specific paths for the professionalization of top bureaucrats. While two types (Types 2 and 3, the legal advisor and the manager, respectively) appear to be truly specialized in terms of the activities they perform (and thus of related capacities), Type 1, the political generalist, is a new configuration of the generalist type because it is characterized by managing activities on the basis of different types of, sometimes unexpected, analytical skills. The political generalist has eclectic analytical skills, being familiar with different techniques, probably acquired during the job, which enhance his or her wise and boundary-crossing activities. This is a novel development that invites us to reconsider the generalist–specialist dichotomy.

In the end, the three empirical types emerging from our analysis show how the focus on analytical capacities and types of information (which were not considered by Howlett & Walker, 2012 in constructing their typology of policy managers) is particularly relevant for empirically distinguishing between different high-level civil servants. Moreover, the three empirical types show how the three perspectives proposed by Feldman and Khademian (2007) can be slightly misleading if different types of public managers are characterized. In fact, the scientific/technical dimension, as well as the experiential dimension, emerges as intrinsically intertwined in each of the three empirical types. Each type has a specific technical dimension (analytical capacity), whereas the experiential dimension (which should be more open to external stakeholders) mainly characterizes the steering type (which should be that representing mainly the top-level coordinators, according to Feldman and Khadimian). Finally, the three empirical types show how the intuition present in Hood and Lodge's classification of bureaucratic competencies can be empirically operationalized, while at the same time demonstrating that, at least empirically, the skills of the sage bureaucrat type and the boundary spanner/broker are required to hold a particular professional role: the political generalist.

Thus, owing to the triangle of bureaucratic policy analysis, these general perspectives on the role of public managers can be better investigated and empirically considered in terms of their pros and cons.

Overall, the triangle of bureaucratic policy analysis shows its conceptual strength in directing empirical research toward a typification of the professional roles of high-level bureaucrats, which can be considered independent of their relationships with politicians or other organizational and cultural factors. Through a focus on what they do and how they do it, specific types of professional roles in policymaking can be extracted. This typification can, for example, be seen as a starting point for a rethinking of the actual relationship between high-level bureaucrats and politicians, since the impact of the relationship in terms of the dynamics of policymaking and policy outputs can differ depending on the professional type of bureaucrat involved.

## CONCLUSION AND LINES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In this paper, we propose a novel conceptualization based on dimensions of policy analysis (policy work, policy analytical capacities, and information collected) to better capture the professional activities and role of senior bureaucrats in policymaking. This analytical framework has been operationalized through a large comparative survey of senior civil servants in four Southern European countries. This has been done to test its reliability and analytical usefulness. This analysis revealed three empirical types of senior officials.

Certainly, our results are limited by the fact that the survey shows a significant variance of the respondents for each country, even though this does not mean that they are not representative of the entire invited population (as explained in the OSM). In any case, the findings confirm that the conceptual lens of our “Triangle” may indeed represent a promising analytical tool for improving our knowledge of high-level civil servants in policymaking. Moreover, we are fully aware that the empirical data on which the analysis in this paper is based and that identify empirical professional types of bureaucrats are survey-based, so it remains to be seen whether and how many bureaucrats actually do what they say

they do. However, we are very confident in the reliability of our analysis, which can serve as a stimulus for innovative research.

The empirical application that we have carried out calls for further research in relation to the countries analyzed and for a wider application by applying it to countries with different administrative traditions.

With respect to Southern European countries, the three empirical types, characterized as polythetic, need to be further analyzed. First, there is a need to deepen their potential analytical meaning through qualitative methods (such as interviews with high civil servants), delineating whether and how these empirical types act concretely in the daily dynamics of administrative behavior. Here, it would be very relevant to shed light on whether and how bureaucrats in the four countries studied, belonging to the three empirical types, behave in the same or different ways in terms of their actual relationship with politicians or in terms of other factors that may influence their role (such as their ideological values or the patterns of the administration in which they work). In fact, according to our assumption, the emerging empirical professional types of bureaucratic roles in policymaking should be considered an autonomous premise for analyzing the relationship between bureaucrats and politicians. That is, the three empirical types represent what bureaucrats are professionally and what they can offer politicians in terms of exchange and negotiation.

A second stream of research should focus on specific policy processes to understand whether and how the three empirical types of bureaucratic roles in the four Southern European countries depend on the position held and/or individual characteristics and whether and how there is a mismatch between the position held and the professional characteristics of the holder of the position (as in the case, e.g., of a Type 2 bureaucrat—legal advisor—assigned to a managerial position or a Type 1—political generalist—assigned to a legal advisory position).

Regarding a wider application of the analytical lenses of the triangle, there is a need to test a larger number of polities than those analyzed, which is better in other country contexts with potential differences in the characteristics of their administrative regimes. This would make it possible to assess whether the three empirical types are embedded only in the four Southern European countries analyzed or whether they can be considered common features of the real functional needs of contemporary public administrations. If so, any variation in the number of types or the composition of the triangulation may prove of great interest in understanding how the context or administrative traditions influence the shape of the triangulation.

Moreover, if applied from a comparative perspective, the analytical lenses of the triangle of bureaucratic policy analysis could contribute to a better understanding of what has actually been happening in the work and the role of senior civil servants in policymaking over the last few decades. For example, particular attention needs to be paid to policy content and dynamics, as they relate to eclectic analytical skills (which characterize the political generalist). These seem to be modern versions of the skills and competencies that bureaucrats acquire diachronically through their work. In addition, a broader comparative perspective can help us understand whether and how organizational processes and administrative institutional arrangements shape, train, or consciously pursue the coherence and consistency of the three dimensions of the bureaucratic policy analysis triangle in high-level bureaucrats.

Finally, a broader comparative perspective could elucidate the relationship between the different types of professional roles that senior officials might play, if typified according to the three policy dimensions of the triangle, and the alternative typological proposals that emphasize other factors as more constraining their role (e.g., the relationship with politicians, the cultural or ideological identity, etc.). The triangle of bureaucratic policy analysis suggests that the professional role that top-level bureaucrats perceive should be taken into serious consideration and that the way in which they interact with other factors could be very important for understanding the real drivers of administrative behavior.

All these points could be considered limitations of this study, but we view them simply as emerging questions or new avenues of research activated by our focus on the triangle of bureaucratic policy analysis, which remains its main original contribution.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank Sabrina Bandera and the *Scuola Nazionale dell'Amministrazione* (SNA) in Italy, Calliope Spanou in Greece, Marcelo Camerlo, Luis Mota and Patricia Silva in Portugal, and José Real-Dato in Spain, for their valuable collaboration in the administration of the online survey. We would also like to thank the five anonymous reviewers who commented on the first version and the second version of this article: they provided useful suggestions and allowed us to significantly improve the quality of the article. This work is to be included among the research products related to the Research Project of Significant National Interest (PRIN) entitled “Who Advises What, When and How? Policy analysis capacity and its impact on Italian policy-making,” funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research. Open access publishing facilitated by Università degli Studi di Bologna, as part of the Wiley - CRUI-CARE agreement.

## FUNDING INFORMATION

This paper is part of the research project MIUR 2017 Who Advises What, When and How? Policy analysis capacity and its impact on Italian policymaking. The data on Spain were collected also under the project ‘Impact of specialized knowledge on the design and adoption of public policy in Spain’ (CONESPOL-PUB, PGC2018-098319-B-C21), funded by MCIN/AEI.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

No conflict of interest to be declared.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data underlying this article are available in the article and in its online supplementary material.

## ORCID

Gilberto Capano  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0389-6706>

Alice Cavalieri  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0553-8574>

Andrea Pritoni  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9619-3641>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> While there has been a well-institutionalized stream of research focusing on policy work in the USA (Meltsner, 1975, 1976), the UK (Page & Jenkins, 2005), New Zealand (Boston et al., 1996), Australia (Head et al., 2014), and Canada (Howlett et al., 2017), and on comparing Anglo-Saxon countries (Craft & Henderson, 2023), only a few European cases have been studied (in addition to previous literature cited, Fleischer, 2009; Nekola & Kohoutek, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> The choice of comparing single countries would probably have led to classifications that, although similar, would not have been the same in each country: this would have made the analytical and theoretical scope of our classification smaller and more fragmented. Yet, in order to be confident in the results of the analysis presented in Section “[Results: Empirical Professional Types of High-Level Civil Servants in Southern Europe](#)”, we also conducted a sensitivity analysis by splitting our sample into two subgroups (Italy and Spain vs. Greece and Portugal) (see endnote 3 for a detailed discussion).

<sup>3</sup> The analysis presented in this section was also carried out by splitting the full sample into two sub-samples (Italy and Spain vs. Greece and Portugal) in order to assess whether the higher number of respondents in Italy and Spain might have influenced the results. When comparing the two pairs of countries, the EFAs on policy analytical capacity do not show any particular differences, either between the pairs of countries or when comparing the total sample and the two sub-samples. Also in terms of sources and types of information, the EFAs on the two sub-populations are rather similar to the overall analysis, especially for Italy and Spain. A more notable difference emerges from the EFAs on policy work: in the case of Italy and Spain, the factors extracted are two instead of three, while in Greece and Portugal they are three as in the main analysis, but qualitatively slightly different. Despite these divergences, the factors are not too different from those obtained in the main empirical analysis and, above all, it should not be surprising that it is precisely in relation to policy work that differences emerge, since policy work is the dimension—among the three in our triangle of bureaucratic policy analysis—that is most closely linked to the specificities of the country analyzed. The administrative systems of the four southern European countries are similar, but certainly not completely indistinguishable, especially in terms of size and functions (e.g., Italy and Spain are more decentralized in political-administrative terms). In any case, although the empirical types resulting from the analysis of the two sub-samples are slightly different from those presented in this section, where all respondents from the four countries are part of a single sample, the overall picture is reasonably confirmed by the comparative test.

<sup>4</sup> Of course, this is more striking if we consider the high percentage of Italian respondents with a legal/judicial background.

## REFERENCES

- Aberbach, J. D., R. D. Putnam, and B. A. Rockman. 1981. *Bureaucrats & Politicians in Western Democracies*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Adams, D. 2004. "Usable Knowledge in Public Policy." *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 63(1): 29–42.
- Alesina, A., and G. Tabellini. 2007. "Bureaucrats or Politicians? Part I: A Single Policy Task." *American Economic Review* 97(1): 169–79.
- Alesina, A., and G. Tabellini. 2008. "Bureaucrats or Politicians? Part II: Multiple Policy Tasks." *Journal of Public Economics* 92(3–4): 426–47.
- Aubin, D., and M. Brans. 2020. "Policy Advisory Styles in the Francophone Belgian Civil Service." *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 86(3): 463–78.
- Bailey, K. 1994. *Typologies and Taxonomies: An Introduction to Classification Techniques*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bailey, K. 2005. "Typology Construction, Methods and Issues." In *Encyclopedia of Social Measurement*, edited by K. Kempf-Leonard, 889–98. Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Barberis, P. 1996. *The Elite of the Elite: Permanent Secretaries in the British Higher Civil Service*. Aldershot: Dartmouth.
- Beckner, M. 1959. *The Biological Way of Thought*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Boston, J., J. Martin, J. Pallot, and P. Walsh. 1996. *Public Management: The New Zealand Model*. Auckland: Oxford University Press.
- Capano, G. 2003. "Administrative Traditions and Policy Change: When Policy Paradigms Matter. The Case of Italian Administrative Reform during the 1990s." *Public Administration* 81(4): 781–801.
- Capano, G., A. Cavalieri, and A. Pritoni. 2024. "Bureaucratic Policy Work and Analytical Capacities in Central Administrations in Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain: The Results of a Comparative Survey." *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 90(2): 385–401.
- Capano, G., and A. Lippi. 2021. "States' performance, reforms, and policy capacity in Southern European Countries." In *Mediterranean Capitalism Revisited. One Model, Different Trajectories*, edited by L. Burrioni, E. Pavolini, and M. Regini, 42–66. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Christensen, J. 2024. "When Bureaucratic Expertise Comes under Attack." *Public Administration* 102(1): 79–94.
- Colebatch, H., R. Hoppe, and M. Noordegraaf, eds. 2010. *Working for Policy*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Colebatch, H. K., ed. 2006. *The Work of Policy: An International Survey*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Craft, J., and S. Henderson. 2023. "Policy Staff and the Evolving Nature of Policy Analytical Capacity in Australia, Britain, Canada, and New Zealand." *Policy Studies* 45: 883–907.
- Craft, J., and M. Wilder. 2017. "Catching a Second Wave: Context and Compatibility in Advisory System Dynamics." *Policy Studies Journal* 45(1): 215–39.
- Downs, A. 1967. *Inside Bureaucracy*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Co.
- Evans, B., and A. Vesely. 2014. "Contemporary Policy Work in Subnational Governments and NGOs: Comparing Evidence from Australia, Canada and The Czech Republic." *Policy and Society* 33(2): 77–87.
- Feldman, M. S., and A. M. Khademan. 2007. "The Role of the Public Manager in Inclusion: Creating Communities of Participation." *Governance* 20(2): 305–24.
- Field, A., J. Miles, and Z. Field. 2012. *Discovering Statistics Using R*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Filgueiras, F., N. Koga, and R. Viana. 2020. "State Capacities and Policy Work in Brazilian Civil Service." *Sociologia e Política* 28(74): 1–22.
- Fleischer, J. 2009. "Power Resources of Parliamentary Executives: Policy Advice in the UK and Germany." *West European Politics* 32(1): 196–214.
- Hammerschmid, G. 2015. *COCOPS Executive Survey on Public Sector Reform in Europe—Views and Experiences from Senior Executives—Reduced Version*. Cologne: GESIS Data Archive. ZA6599 Data File Version 1.0.3. <https://doi.org/10.4232/1.12475>.
- Hammerschmid, G., S. Van de Walle, R. Andrews, and P. Bezes, eds. 2016. *Public Administration Reforms in Europe: The View from the Top*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Hassenteufel, P., and P. Zittoun. 2017. "From Policy Analytical Styles to Policymaking Styles." In *Routledge Handbook of Comparative Policy Analysis*, edited by M. Brans, I. Geva-May, and M. Howlett, 56–69. London: Routledge.
- Head, B., M. Ferguson, A. Cherney, and P. Boreham. 2014. "Are Policy-Makers Interested in Social Research? Exploring the Sources and Uses of Valued Information among Public Servants in Australia." *Policy and Society* 33(2): 89–101.
- Hood, C., and M. Lodge. 2006. *The Politics of Public Service Bargains*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hooghe, L. 2001. *The European Commission and the Integration of Europe: Images of Governance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Howlett, M. 2019. "Comparing Policy Advisory Systems beyond the OECD: Models, Dynamics and the Second-Generation Research Agenda." *Policy Studies* 40(3–4): 241–59.
- Howlett, M., and E. Lindquist. 2004. "Policy Analysis and Governance: Analytical and Policy Styles in Canada." *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis* 6(3): 225–49.
- Howlett, M., and J. Newman. 2010. "Policy Analysis and Policy Work in Federal Systems: Policy Advice and its Contribution to Evidence-Based Policy-Making in Multi-Level Governance Systems." *Policy and Society* 29(1): 123–36.

- Howlett, M., and R. M. Walker. 2012. "Public Managers in the Policy Process: More Evidence on the Missing Variable?" *Policy Studies Journal* 40(2): 211–33.
- Howlett, M., A. Wellstead, and J. Craft, eds. 2017. *Policy Work in Canada: Professional Practices and Analytical Capacities*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Howlett, M., and A. M. Wellstead. 2011. "Policy Analysts in the Bureaucracy Revisited: The Nature of Professional Policy Work in Contemporary Government." *Politics & Policy* 39(4): 613–33.
- Howlett, M., and A. M. Wellstead. 2012. "Professional Policy Work in Federal States: Institutional Autonomy and Canadian Policy Analysis." *Canadian Public Administration-Administration Publique du Canada* 55(1): 53–68.
- Jain, P. M., and V. K. Shandliya. 2013. "A Survey Paper on Comparative Study between Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)." *International Journal of Computer Science and Applications* 6(2): 373–5.
- Jann, W., and K. Wegrich. 2019. "Generalists and Specialists in Executive Politics: Why Ambitious Meta-Policies So Often Fail." *Public Administration* 97(4): 845–60.
- Kickert, W. 2011. "Distinctiveness of Administrative Reform in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain. Common Characteristics, of Context, Administration and Reforms." *Public Administration* 89(4): 801–18.
- Koga, N. M., M. Loureiro, P. L. de Moura Palotti, R. da Silva Lins, B. Gontyo do Couto, and S. Nogueira Lima. 2022. "Analysing the Information Sources Brazilian Bureaucrats Use as Evidence in Everyday Policymaking." *Policy & Politics* 50(4): 483–506.
- Lazarsfeld, P. 1937. "Some Remarks on the Typological Procedures in Social Research." *Z. Sozialforsch* 6: 119–39.
- Maley, M. 2015. "The Policy Work of Australian Political Staff." *International Journal of Public Administration* 38(1): 46–55.
- Mayer, I. S., C. E. van Daalen, and P. W. G. Bots. 2001. "Perspectives on Policy Analyses: A Framework for Understanding and Design." *Journal of Technology, Policy and Management* 4(2): 169–91.
- Meltsner, A. J. 1975. "Bureaucratic Policy Analysts." *Policy Analysis* 1(1): 115–31.
- Meltsner, A. J. 1976. *Policy Analysts in the Bureaucracy*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Mukherjee, I., and A. S. Bali. 2019. "Policy Effectiveness and Capacity: Two Sides of the Design Coin." *Policy Design and Practice* 2(2): 103–14.
- Nay, O. 2012. "How do Policy Ideas Spread among International Administrations? Policy Entrepreneurs and Bureaucratic Influence in the UN Response to AIDS." *Journal of Public Policy* 32(1): 53–76.
- Nekola, M., and J. Kohoutek. 2016. "Policy Work at the Sub-National Level: Analytical Styles of Canadian and Czech Directors and Managers." *Canadian Public Administration* 59(2): 289–309.
- Newman, J., E. Patmisari, and I. Widianingsih. 2022. "Policy Analytical Capacity and "Eastern" Styles of Policy Analysis: Evidence from West Java Province, Indonesia." *Policy Sciences* 55(3): 469–85.
- Niskanen, W. 1975. "Bureaucrats and Politicians." *Journal of Law and Economics* 18(3): 617–44.
- Ongaro, E. 2010a. *Public Management Reform and Modernization. Trajectories of Administrative Changes in Italy, France, Greece, Portugal and Spain*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Ongaro, E. 2010b. "The Napoleonic Administrative Tradition and Public Management Reform in France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain." In *Tradition and Public Administration*, edited by M. Painter and B. G. Peters, 174–90. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Page, E. 2010. "Bureaucrats and Expertise: Elucidating a Problematic Relationship in Three Tableaux and Six Jurisdictions." *Sociologie du Travail* 52(2): 255–73.
- Page, E., and B. Jenkins. 2005. *Policy Bureaucracy: Government with a Cast of Thousands*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Page, E., and V. Wright, eds. 1999. *Bureaucratic Elites in Western Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Page, E. C. 1997. *People Who Run Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Parrado, S. 2014. "Analytical Capacity." In *The Problem-Solving Capacity of the Modern State*, edited by M. Lodge and K. Wegrich, 86–104. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Peters, B. G. 1989a. "Bureaucrats and Politicians in the Politics of Policymaking." In *Bureaucracy and Public Choice*, edited by J. E. Lane, 256–82. London: Sage.
- Peters, B. G. 1989b. *The Politics of Bureaucracy*. New York: Longman Publishing Group.
- Peters, B. G., and J. Pierre, eds. 2001. *Politicians, Bureaucrats and Administrative Reform*. London: Routledge.
- Peters, B. G., and J. Pierre. 2015. "Governance and Civil Service Systems: From Easy Answers to Hard Questions." In *Comparative Civil Service Systems in the 21st Century*, edited by F. M. Van der Meer, J. C. N. Raadschelders, and T. A. J. Toonen, 286–300. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Saguin, K., and P. L. Palotti. 2021. "How Do Middle Managers Matter in Policymaking? Examining Managerial Work and Influence in Brazil." *International Journal of Public Administration* 44(16): 1394–1403.
- Saguin, K., M. Ramesh, and M. Howlett. 2018. "Policy Work and Capacities in a Developing Country: Evidence from The Philippines." *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration* 40(1): 1–22.
- Steen, T., and U. Weske. 2016. "Understanding Elites: Values, Attitudes, Motivations and Role Perceptions of Top Public Sector Executives in Europe." In *Public Administration Reforms in Europe: The View from the Top*, edited by G. Hammerschmid, S. Van de Walle, R. Andrews, and P. Bezes, 26–38. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Vesely, A. 2017. "Policy Advice as Policy Work: A Conceptual Framework for Multi-Level Analysis." *Policy Sciences* 50(1): 139–54.
- Vesely, A., A. Wellstead, and B. Evans. 2014. "Comparing Sub-National Policy Workers in Canada and The Czech Republic: Who Are They, What They Do, and Why It Matters?" *Policy and Society* 33(2): 103–15.
- Weber, M. 1992. *Economy and Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press [First Published in 1921].

- Weimer, D. L., and A. R. Vining. 1999. *Policy Analysis: Concepts and Practice*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Wellstead, A., and R. Stedman. 2010. "Policy Capacity and Incapacity in Canada's Federal Government: The Intersection of Policy Analysis and Street-Level Bureaucracy." *Public Management Review* 12(6): 893–910.
- Wellstead, A., R. Stedman, and E. Lindquist. 2009. "The Nature of Regional Policy Work in Canada's Federal Public Service." *Canadian Political Science Review* 3(1): 34–56.
- Wellstead, A. M., R. C. Stedman, and M. Howlett. 2011. "Policy Analytical Capacity in Changing Governance Contexts: A Structural Equation Model (SEM) Study of Contemporary Canadian Policy Work." *Public Policy and Administration* 26(3): 353–72.
- Wollmann, H. 1989. "Policy Analysis in West Germany's Federal Government: A Case of Unfinished Governmental and Administrative Modernization?" *Governance* 2(3): 233–66.
- Wu, X., M. Howlett, and M. Ramesh, eds. 2018. *Policy Capacity and Governance: Assessing Governmental Competences and Capabilities in Theory and Practice*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES



**Giliberto Capano** is a professor of Public Policy at the University of Bologna, Italy. He specializes in public administration, public policy analysis, and comparative higher education. His research focuses on governance dynamics and performance in higher education and education, policy design and policy change, policy instruments' impact, the social role of political science, the policy impact of COVID-19, and leadership as an embedded function of policy making. His recent books are *A modern Guide to Public Policy* (coedited with M. Howlett, Edward Elgar, 2020); *Convergence and Diversity in the Governance of Higher Education* (coedited with D. Jarvis, Cambridge University Press, 2020); *Trajectories of Governance How States Shaped Policy Sectors in the Neoliberal Age* (co-authored with A. Zito, J. Rayner, and F. Toth, Palgrave, 2022); *The Fate of Political Scientists in Europe* (with Luca Verzichelli, Palgrave, 2023).



**Alice Cavalieri** is a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Trieste (Italy), where she works on a project about the response of parliaments and governments to different crises. Her main research interests are public budgeting and women's representation. Her first book, *Italian Budgeting Policy* (Palgrave Macmillan; 2023), has been awarded the "Pietro Grilli di Cortona" Biannual Prize for the best book published by a member of the Italian Political Science Association. She is a member of the Italian team of the Comparative Agendas Project and former country lead for Italy of the OxCGRT led by the Blavatnik School of Government (University of Oxford).



**Andrea Pritoni** is an associate professor of Political Science in the Department of Arts at the University of Bologna, where he teaches Electoral Campaigns in Italy and Institutional Relations and Advocacy. His main research interests relate to Italian politics, lobbying and interest group politics, as well as comparative public policy. He has recently published articles on *South European Society & Politics* (2024), *International Review of Administrative Sciences* (2024) and *European Political Science* (2024).

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

**How to cite this article:** Capano, Giliberto, Alice Cavalieri and Andrea Pritoni. 2025. “The Triangle of Bureaucratic Policy Analysis and the Professional Types of High-level Civil Servants: Empirical Evidence From Southern Europe.” *Policy Studies Journal* 53(1): 69–90. <https://doi.org/10.1111/psj.12577>.