

Policy advisory styles in the Francophone Belgian civil service

Journal:	<i>International Review of Administrative Sciences</i>
Manuscript ID	IRAS-2016-073.R1
Manuscript Type:	Articles
Keywords:	policy analytical capacity, policy work, policy advisory styles, politico-administrative relation
Abstract:	In a context of rising importance of ministerial advisers, this article provides empirical evidence about the nature of involvement of civil servants in policy work. Based on a survey of graduated civil servants in Francophone Belgium, it shows that civil servants are much involved in policy work even in a politico-administrative system characterised by strong ministerial cabinets. Belgian Francophone civil servants are 'incidental advisors'. They are less process generalists than issue specialists who mostly deal with policy implementation. Their policy advisory style oscillates between 'rational technician' and 'client advisor'. Despite a low institutionalisation of policy advice in the civil service, civil servants significantly serve the ministers in the policy formulation phase, supplying information and analysis and participating to the writing of policy-related texts.

Policy advisory styles in the Francophone Belgian civil service

Abstract

In a context of rising importance of ministerial advisers, this article provides empirical evidence about the nature of involvement of civil servants in policy work. Based on a survey of graduated civil servants in Francophone Belgium, it shows that civil servants are much involved in policy work even in a politico-administrative system characterised by strong ministerial cabinets. Belgian Francophone civil servants are ‘incidental advisors’. They are less process generalists than issue specialists who mostly deal with policy implementation. Their policy advisory style oscillates between ‘rational technician’ and ‘client advisor’. Despite a low institutionalisation of policy advice in the civil service, civil servants significantly serve the ministers in the policy formulation phase, supplying information and analysis and participating to the writing of policy-related texts.

Keywords: *policy work, policy advisory styles, politico-administrative relation, policy analytical capacity*

Points for practitioners

The Francophone Belgian case shows the importance of policy tasks conducted by civil servants. It also provides evidence about the importance of in-house policy analytical capacity as it shows that civil servants primarily rely on internal information sources and consultation when involved in policy formulation.

Civil servants perform policy work, an activity shared with many actors inside and outside governments: garnering of information, demarcation of problem definitions, design and comparison of policy instruments, and evaluation of policies. Policy work is an important matter for Public Administration. Since its origins, Public Administration has raised the concern of the separation of administration from politics (McCandless and Guy, 2013). This politico-administrative dichotomy shows the impossibility to extricate politics, and consequently policy formulation, from civil servants' work (Svara, 2001; Bourgon, 2010).

Policy work has been subject to increasing academic attention with the aim to provide knowledge about the everyday practice of policy workers, notably civil servants (Colebatch and Radin, 2006: 225). Existing research has revealed that policy workers are mostly policy-process generalists educated in social sciences who received very little policy-related training and rather do not use sophisticated analytical techniques to process information. Although these findings give a first insight to the nature of policy work and the profile of policy analysts, empirical research in more countries is advocated (Newman, 2017).

This article contributes to the general study of actual policy analysis within government with the case of Francophone Belgium. Extending the enquiry to all graduated civil servants, it shows that Belgian Francophone civil servants are 'incidental advisors' whose policy analytical style oscillates between that of 'rational technician' and 'client advisor'. Policy work is widely distributed among a large group of issue specialists whose main policy task is implementation. This case is illustrative of the Napoleonic system of public administration where policy formulation is traditionally monopolised by the extensive staff of the ministers' personal offices, traditionally referred to as ministerial cabinets. Relying on a survey in Francophone Belgium, the article shows that civil servants are still much involved in policy

1
2
3 formulation, even if the politico-administrative system in which they function is characterised
4
5 by the central policy role of ministerial cabinets.
6

7
8 Ministerial cabinets are understood as an extension of the core executive, located at the
9
10 structural interface between politics and administration. They are composed of political and
11
12 partisan advisers that assist the ministers in achieving their political goals (Connaughton,
13
14 2015). Their growing number may challenge civil servants' role in policy formulation
15
16 (Öhberg et al., 2017). The two French-speaking governments of Belgium, namely Wallonia
17
18 and the Federation Wallonia-Brussels, never attempted to downsize ministerial cabinets,
19
20 contrary to the Federal government and Flanders. As such, Francophone Belgium is a 'most
21
22 likely case' (Flyvbjerg, 2006) of strong ministerial cabinet's influence, which allows to infer
23
24 that if civil servants play a role in policy formulation in this system, they would in any other
25
26 democratic government.
27

28
29 The next part presents the concept of policy work and reflects upon the activities of civil
30
31 servants related to policy work and the techniques used. After the survey method is specified,
32
33 the results are presented and discussed. They relate to the location and tasks of civil servants
34
35 and the information sources and tools they use in working for policy.
36
37
38
39
40
41

42 **1 Civil servants as incidental advisers: from a holist to an individual perspective**
43
44

45
46 Policy work is a rather loose concept revolving around the question of how actors of the policy
47
48 process commit themselves in the formulation of public policies. It consists of "providing
49
50 analytical support to government for making intelligent choices for solving societal problems"
51
52 (Colebatch et al., 2010). Policy work is related to maintenance, production, and service (Page
53
54 and Jenkins, 2005: 56). Maintenance focuses on policy implementation and evaluation, and
55
56
57
58
59
60

production to the participation in writing a ‘variety of sorts of documents’ (e.g. white papers and bills). Service consists in offering knowledge and skills to others who produce policies.

Policy advice is an activity that applies to a range of policy work and includes “research, data analysis, proposal development, consultation with stakeholders, formulation of advice for decision makers, guiding policy through governmental and parliamentary processes, and the subsequent evaluation of the outcomes of the policy” (Gregory and Lonti, 2008: 838 in Craft and Wilder, 2017). Policy analysis is applied social and scientific research as well as more implicit forms of practical knowledge directed at influencing the courses of actions of political decision-makers (Dobuzinskis et al., 2007). The outcome of policy analysis is eventually policy advice, which we understand as recommendations or opinions about future courses of government action (Brans et al., 2012). The three concepts have blurred boundaries, but share a common attempt to describe the machinery of the policy process.

Traditionally, policy advice was generated by bureaucratic officials located at the top of a public organisation to guide policy-makers and support their decisions, but the monopoly of contemporary bureaucracies on expertise and policy advice has been increasingly contested (Brans et al., 2012; Meltsner, 1976). Nowadays, the government’s capacity to design well-crafted public policies relies on a policy advisory system that extends itself far beyond the borders of the public sphere (Halligan, 1995). After a wide-range of government activities were outsourced or transferred to the private sector and other actors outside government, the overall policy analytical capacity of the policy advisory system must be assessed as well as the remaining contribution of civil servants in the policy process (Howlett, 2015).

Despite important transformations of the policy landscape, middle-range civil servants still matter in the policy process. They do not only advice executive politicians, but are more than often truly taking part in the decision process and work with considerable discretion (Page and Jenkins, 2005: 81). They are working on broad cross-cutting issues, and are “not simply

concerned with subordinate ‘embellishment and detail’ of issues settled at a higher level” (Page and Jenkins, 2005: 15). They are still important actors on the policy process and public organizations must be aware of their contribution to overall policy capacity.

Empirical studies show that policy analysts are involved in a wide array of activities, which are sometimes rather remote from analysis (Hird, 2005; Radin, 2013). Reciprocally, diverse policy workers are involved in policy advice without being recognised as policy analysts. There are more policy workers participating in the policy advisory system than those who are officially denoted as ‘policy advisers’ (Veselý, 2017; Fleischer, 2009). They undertake a wide range of activities from identifying policy problems, setting objectives, selecting instruments, negotiating with stakeholders, being involved in implementation and consulting with the public. What is true for the whole community of policy advisers is true for civil servants as well. For many of them, policy advice is only one activity among other standard administrative tasks. They are ‘incidental advisors’ (Veselý, 2017). This article describes how policy advice is distributed in the whole civil service.

Competing typologies of policy advice have been developed. Meltsner depicted four types of policy analysts along two attributes of (high and low) political and technical skills: The entrepreneur, the technician, the politician, and the pretender (1976: 16). This dichotomy between technical and political activities still holds even if it was challenged by other characteristics, such as location, government control or role perception (Craft and Howlett, 2012: 81).

It is usually expected that civil servants involved in policy advice are trained policy analysts who use formal analytical techniques to process information rationally, show evidence and select the most efficient tools to tackle the policy problems (Mayer et al., 2004). Formal techniques comprise quantitative methods (for example surveys, cost-benefit analysis, multiple-criteria decision analysis), trend extrapolations (for example causal models, logical

frames and foresight), and analysis of organisations (for example SWOT and decision tress), and are put forward in many ‘toolkit’ policy analysis textbooks (for example Dunn, 2008; Weimer and Vining, 2010).

However, this emphasis on formal analysis of policy issues is somewhat exaggerated and underestimates the importance of procedural activities (Radin, 2013). Policy work includes the key activities of making, maintaining and coordinating the actors’ interactions as well: “Instead of finding rational solutions to policy problems, policy work is used for getting support for certain ideas and interests” (Kohoutek et al., 2013: 34; see also Maybin 2015). It involves analysing the political and multi-actor context (for example stakeholder analysis and Delphi methods) or attempting to ‘make sense together’ (for example interviews or brainstorming) (Hoppe and Jeliazkova, 2006).

This corresponds to the other common distinction in policy advice between substance and process (Hoppe and Jeliazkova, 2006; Nekola and Kohoutec, 2016). Substantive advisors or ‘specialists’ are civil servants who possess an expertise of a field or hold technical skills without having necessarily been trained as policy analysts (Lindquist and Desvaux, 2007: 123). They are professionals “such as lawyers, doctors, architects, etc. [who] utilise their expertise one way of another in order to participate in the making of what we call policy” (Kohoutek et al., 2013: 32). The procedural analysts, in turn, or ‘generalists’ rely on capabilities “to develop broader views on policy issues, to identify horizontal linkages across issues, and sometimes to develop more comprehensive as opposed to selective policy initiatives” (Lindquist and Desvaux, 2007: 123). Although generalists are expected to engage more in formal policy analysis than specialists, specialists are not kept on the side-line of policy formulation. Policy analysis is not the ownership of pure analysts or specifically trained in-house consultants, but a part of the day-to-day activity of middle-range officials.

As a synthesis, Nekola and Kohoutec proposed a simple cross-sectional typology of policy advisory styles combining these two most used attributes of politics versus technics and substance versus process (2016). The typology, largely inspired by Mayer et al. (2004) ends up with four types of policy advisory advisory styles (see table 1).

Table 1 Policy advisory styles

*** Please insert Figure 1 ***

Source: Adapted from Nekola and Kohoutec (2016)

Rational technicians (1) correspond to the standard image of policy analysts. Civil servants find rational solutions to policy problems on the basis of specialized knowledge for problem-solving and formal analytical techniques. They are involved in research, studies and evaluation, and convert findings in policy advice and decision. In terms of information, they rely mostly on scientific evidence, study reports, and do not have much contact with relevant stakeholders.

Process generalists (2) possess knowledge of the complex processes leading to the acceptance of a public policy. On the one hand, they monitor the process internally and care for the practical implications of policy proposals, such as budgetary and legal aspects. They rely on current regulations and programs, parliamentary documents, and internal information. On the other hand, they facilitate the formulation process both internally and externally. They are developing skills such as negotiation, bargaining, and building support, and spend much time meeting with colleagues or stakeholders. Their analytical techniques are both relational (brainstorming and interviews) and managerial (SWOT, management games, and decision trees).

1
2
3 *Client advisors* (3) identify different actors and their interests to provide clients with strategic
4 advice on how to most effectively achieve a goal in given political circumstances. They
5 consult and prepare presentations and notes to the ministers and their cabinet. In terms of
6 information, they mostly rely on external documents, such as press articles and reports from
7 civil society, but also on the clients' documents, and seek advice for external actors, including
8 the political parties. They specialize in decision-support techniques such as multicriteria
9 analysis, benchmarking, and logical frames.
10
11

12
13
14
15
16
17
18 *Democratic issue advocates* (4) deal with normative issues related to the desirability and
19 usage of public policy. They are sensible to the stakeholder's perception and framing of social
20 problems, and the meaning they attribute to public policy. They consider and aggregate the
21 values and arguments put forth by the public. They are involved in tasks which test the
22 societal support of policy proposals and mobilise external sources of information, notably
23 from civil society and the public. They use relational techniques which help involve
24 stakeholders in the formulation process (Delphi, foresight analysis, as well as stakeholder
25 analysis).
26
27

28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36 Variations in political-administrative relations and the administrative organisation of
37 governments increase the differences in policy advisory styles. In some countries, ministerial
38 cabinets are much involved in policy formulation, and count a hundred of staffs or more,
39 composed of both civil servants on secondment and personal advisers to the ministers
40 (OECD, 2011). When ministerial cabinets hold important policy making functions, it is
41 expected that civil servants will be less involved in policy formulation and concentrate on
42 implementation. When civil servants do advise the minister, they would stick to positions that
43 are professional and fact-driven.
44
45

46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54 The case of Francophone Belgium is particularly emblematic of a heavy weight of ministerial
55 cabinets and the absence of policy analysts as a recognised profession. In Belgium, the role of
56
57

ministerial cabinets is so pivotal and prevalent in the politico-administrative relation that it was qualified as a ‘ménage à trois’ the executive being composed of the Cabinet, ministries, and ministerial cabinets (Brans et al., 2017; De Visscher and Houlberg Salomonsen, 2013). Thus, the role of ministerial cabinets is particularly prevalent in Belgium and would supposedly reduce civil servants’ work to mere implementation.

The degree of involvement of civil servants in policy formulation may also vary along the way the public service is structured in terms of organisation. Policy analysis and advice may be concentrated in policy units or spread among the departments. The existence of policy units is supposed to increase in-house policy analytical capacity (Halligan, 1995: 146). But under the impact of managerialism, departmental policy units have been buffeted which “contributed to the weakening of internal capacity and the increasing use of the external consultant” (Halligan, 1995: 146). The related assumption is that a public service without many policy units has a lower policy analytical capacity. Civil servants would use less formal analytical techniques in processing the information and formulating advice.

2 Surveying the Francophone Belgian civil service

An original large-scale survey was conducted about in-house policy analysis in Belgium between the end of 2013 and mid 2015 both at the federal level and in the two main regions of the country. This article analyses the results for Wallonia and the Federation Wallonia-Brussels (or French Community), two autonomous French-speaking federated entities.

The survey was addressed in French to all the graduated civil servants of both governments. The political advisers in the ministerial cabinets were not included. Given that policy analyst is not a recognised profession or an officially attributable position, it was necessary to target all the civil servants holding a university degree regardless of position or function. The

Secretary Generals of the two ministries authorised the survey and accommodated the research team's request to provide them with a full contact list. In limited cases the contact lists provided by some public agencies was already a pre-selection of officials involved in policy analysis. The survey used an in-house version of LimeSurvey.

In terms of content, this survey replicates most of the questionnaire used by Howlett and colleagues in Canada, but is partly adapted to national characteristics (Howlett and Newman, 2010; Howlett et al., 2015; Howlett and Wellstead, 2012). It includes about 30 questions divided in four chapters: the nature of policy work, analytical techniques, advisory system in the sector, and policy analytical capacity.

In total, the survey was sent to 4,155 officials. This includes 2,893 civil servants within the centralised department and agencies of Wallonia and 1,262 civil servants within the administrations and agencies of the Federation Wallonia-Brussels. In total, 1,314 completed the survey or filled it in partially, which corresponds to a response rate of 32%.

In terms of distribution, all the sectors are represented in which Civil Service, Secretariat General, and Social Action come first (respectively 16%, 9% and 10%), and Energy and Local Authorities come last (1% and 3%). 78% are working in the ministries and 22% in the public agencies, 69% working for Wallonia and 31% for the Federation Wallonia-Brussels. In terms of gender, 45% of the respondents are women and 55% men and their median age is 47.

About data analysis, the presentation of the results relies on descriptive statistics using relative frequencies. To increase the validity of the answers, only the respondents who answered to all items in each block of questions were kept and the internal consistency of the answers was systematically tested with a Crombach α . The test results are above 0.8 which indicates that the variables make sense to measure policy work. The 'distribution of time' variable ($\alpha = .6111$) is an exception and should be kept aside for further statistical analysis.

3 Civil servants’ policy tasks in Francophone Belgium

Policy units are rather scarce in Francophone Belgium. Only 4% of the respondents consider that policy formulation is their unit’s main function. Unsurprisingly, the regional administrations are mainly turned to policy implementation, inspection and control (64%). However, when the answers about policy formulation, coordination, evaluation and studies are summed up, the answers related to policy analytical work reach 20%.

Individually, the civil servants recognise that their work is devoted to a series of policy-related activities. A majority is involved in writing policy-documents, most of them devoting 5 to 15% of their time to this activity (see Figure°1). Hence, policy work is an activity widely shared within the public service.

Figure 1 Time devoted to policy work (N=849, $\alpha=0.61$)

*** Please insert Figure 1 ***

A great deal of civil servants is involved in the preparation of policy documents. About a quarter are at least often involved in the writing of policy documents, but most of them are only involved occasionally (for example 58% are at least occasionally involved in writing strategic policy notes to the ministers, and 25% rather frequently) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 Involvement in the preparation of policy documents (N=934, $\alpha=0.89$)

*** Please insert Figure 2 ***

The most frequently cited activity is answering questions from ministerial cabinets (35%). Belgian Francophone civil servants have a function of service to the ministers and their cabinets, who are the prime policy designers and decision makers. Nevertheless, their involvement in policy formulation remains important. About 25% of them prepare strategic notes, either to the minister or internal to the administration. A smaller group participates in the writing of new regulation, policy notes or reports to the minister, or the preparation of budgetary documents (about 15-20%). Naturally, most of these activities are conducted in close connection with the minister.

The involvement of civil servants in the preparation of policy tasks can be manifold (see Figure 3). It consists mainly of implementing policy decisions, or assisting the ministers and their cabinet in policy formulation. 41% of the respondents declare being frequently involved in implementing public policies. It is yet more surprising to see that the same proportion thinks that they are not really involved in policy implementation. This result maybe depends on the interpretation of the question, figuring out that activities of follow-up, inspection or control are not part of policy implementation. It may also relate to the involvement in support functions such as IT, human resource management, or maintenance of the infrastructure.

Figure 3 Involvement in policy-related tasks (N=916, $\alpha=0.87$)

*** Please insert Figure 3 ***

The participation in the 'production' of public policies is shown here but only concerns a few staffers who work as auxiliaries to the ministers. About 13% of the graduated civil servants declare being involved in the follow-up of research or evaluation. They also assess the legal

acceptability and budgetary impacts of policy proposals. The five items more closely associated with policy design or policy advice are reported only by a mere 5% of the respondents (from testing the feasibility to deciding on policy options). This confirms the direct involvement of a small group of civil servants in the design of policies.

4 Sources of information used in policy work

Policy work relies on data collection and processing. Besides the consultation of documents, civil servants seek advice from their colleagues or the stakeholders.

Regarding the use of documents, the answers emphasise an average use of current regulation or strategic plans as the most frequent (see Figure 4). 63% of respondents declare using them often or always. Political documents from the minister are also widely used, 36% using them often, and an additional 30% occasionally.

Figure 4 Information sources used in policy work (N=759, $\alpha=0.88$)

***** Please insert Figure 4 *****

Many civil servants read newspapers, but surprisingly, scientific articles come fourth with 29% of respondents using them often and 57% at least occasionally. One should bear in mind that the respondents are all graduated and often occupy functions related to their initial training. Below this top four appear the reports and studies from the internal research units or the European and international organisations. Other external sources of information are more scarcely used, except by the top 10% civil servants who seem to be the most closely

connected to policy work. These results reveal that the internal capacity to manage information is still critical for the running of public administrations.

In their analytical tasks, civil servants do not only use documents, they request opinions from their colleagues or external experts. First, the most important requests are addressed to civil servants from the same sector (see Figure 5). 61% of the respondents consult their direct colleagues at least once a month. Reciprocally, 50% also receive advice from colleagues without requesting it. Next, they request information from civil servants from other sectors (26%), other national public organisations (18%) and experts from in-house research institutes (9%). They also receive advice from colleagues from other sectors (21%). Again, in-house government communication is a critical resource.

Figure 5 Advice requested or received

*** Please insert Figure 5 ***

The consultation of stakeholders is less frequent. Despite a compulsory role, advisory bodies are regular suppliers of advice for barely 8% of the respondents, and 10% request information from them. Advice remains limited with private actors, even with the social interlocutors. In a multi-level governance frame, it is also surprising that the request for advice to international and European organisations is limited too. However, the survey covers all the policy sectors and several are not much influenced by supranational policies (for example culture, education, or road maintenance).

5 Knowledge and use of analytical techniques

Once obtained, information must be processed. It is possible that a fair deal of information is dealt with rather informally and turned into policy advice without much preceding policy analysis. However, civil servants in Francophone Belgium use a range of analytical techniques (see Figure 6). They first report to use interviews or focus groups and brainstorming at least several times a year (respectively 62% and 58%). Some of them even declare a most intensive use, at least monthly (30% and 22%). Of course, the survey relies on a self-assessment and does not assess the degree of mastering of each practice.

Two very formal techniques, multi-criteria analysis (30%) and cost-benefit analysis (28%) form a second group which about 10% of the respondents use more intensively. Many other techniques are cited but by a smaller group of respondents: stakeholders' analysis (24%), benchmarking (22%), survey (22%), and SWOT analysis (18%). A few formalised techniques are more used than the others, but only few respondents are frequent users (less than 10%). Indeed, very few analysts in the Francophone governments are experts in specific techniques and spend much time applying them. The fact that many respondents never use the techniques is not surprising given the large population surveyed.

Figure 6 Use of analytical techniques (N=763, $\alpha=0.88$)

*** Please insert Figure 6 ***

In sum, many analytical techniques are known and used in the public administration. The first two are not the most formal ones, but they are closely followed by a series of techniques usually used for producing evidence on policies.

6 Discussion

Civil servants are definitely involved in policy work in Francophone Belgium, despite a very strong involvement of ministerial cabinets in policy formulation. This work is not concentrated in policy units, but spread across the departments. Contrary to Canada, this absence of concentration of policy work is not the result of managerial reforms (see Halligan 1995). In Francophone Belgium, administrative reforms did not affect the structure of government, but only procedures (for example the introduction of mandates, performance contracts, and internal audits). Belgian Francophone civil servants are ‘incidental advisors’ (Vesely 2017). Their commitment shows that policy advice does not necessarily need formal institutionalization to be practiced (Vesely, Wellstead and Evans 2014: 111).

Policy work does not rely exclusively on policy analysis and the use of formal analytical techniques. 20 to 30% of the respondents declare a frequent use of formal techniques and even a group of less than 10% reports a monthly use, yet the use of such relational techniques as interviews and focus groups, brainstorming, and stakeholder analysis, is more intense. This confirms the importance of this relational aspect of policy analysis, also found in Canada (Howlett et al., 2015: 165). The quality of policy work also relies on the ability to engage in interactions with stakeholders, and to communicate effectively with political executives.

The policy advisory styles of the graduated civil servants from the Belgian Francophone governments oscillate between ‘rational technician’ and ‘client advisor’. A fraction of their activities is assimilated to the ‘rational technicians’ who address the substance of policy from a rational perspective. They participate to research and studies for more than 15% of their time (27% of the respondents), rely on scientific articles (29%), use reports (23%) and consult experts from governmental research units (9%). Some of them also use formal analytical techniques such as multi-criteria analysis (30%) and cost-benefit analysis (28%).

A fair deal of their policy work also consists in advising the ministers which falls in the category of ‘client advisors’. They are frequently involved in writing policy notes or reports to the ministers (25%), but less in strategic notes to the ministers (16%). Only a fraction of them participate to the formulation of the government coalition agreement, investigate political risks for the minister or directly assist the ministerial cabinet members in inter-cabinet meetings and the minister in parliament (about 5%). Although civil servants are contributing, most part of the ‘client advice’ is still supplied by ministerial cabinet members.

‘Process generalists’ is a less common style among Francophone civil servants. 22% of them are often participating to the production of budgetary documents and about 10% are assessing the legal acceptability and budgetary aspects of policy proposals. The related techniques mentioned that civil servants use several times a year are SWOT analysis (18%), decision trees (13%) and management games (6%). Civil servants participate to the policy process first as specialists of a policy issue.

The involvement in ‘democratic issues’ is very limited too. Although a fair amount of time devoted to policy work is spent in meeting with colleagues and stakeholders (42%), it seems that internal contacts are privileged. The tasks of testing the timing and feasibility of policy options as well as the societal support for policies are very unfrequent (< 5%). Most information sources are also internal, even if 16% of the respondents often use parliamentary documents and 12% the reports from NGOs and civil society. The consultation of advisory bodies is limited (10%), as well as the request or reception of advice from private actors. Relational techniques, such as focus groups and interviews concern as much the colleagues as the stakeholders (62%). In sum, Francophone civil servants’ policy work is more oriented towards substance than process. When involved in policy tasks they are ‘rational technicians’ and ‘client advisors’. However, one must keep in mind that in their immense majority, they

are ‘incidental advisors’. Only a share of about 10% of the respondents seems to be intensely involved in policy work.

Ministerial cabinets play a dominant role in the policy process in Francophone Belgium. Policy work of many respondents is seen as a contribution to the work of ministerial staffers. This is for instance the case with answering questions from the ministerial cabinet or preparing policy notes to the minister. Information is often coming from the ministerial cabinets. The other evidence is that almost no civil servants are involved in the assessment of policy options (for example testing the timing and feasibility of policy options, investigating political risks or testing societal support). Hence, the policy work of most Francophone civil servants is mostly ‘service’ (Page and Jenkins, 2005), they offer knowledge and skills to those who actually produce the policy programs, namely the ministerial staffers.

At the same time, this service to the ministers is critical in the quality of public policies and must be conceived as an active participation (‘production’) to policy formulation. The departments maintain the informational resources that are essential to make informed decisions. In fact, the data show that civil servants still rely a lot on internal information sources. The ministerial cabinets supposedly rely on this internal information too, as they very often ask questions to civil servants about policy formulation. It appears also that a little fraction of civil servants is more intensively involved in the production of policies. More than 10% declare to be involved in policy-related tasks quite often. Thus, this ‘service’ job appears to be a strong contribution to policy work and in-house informational resources and policy capacity remain critical for the design of ‘good’ policies even at a time of extensive outsourcing and consultancy.

Conclusion

Belgian Francophone civil servants are ‘incidental advisors’ (Veselý, 2017). They are specialists of their own subsector and their main task is policy implementation. When they are incidentally engaged in policy advice they focus more on substance than process and act as ‘rational technicians’ and ‘client advisors’ (Nekola and Kohoutec, 2016; Mayer et al., 2004). Civil servants are ‘rational technicians’ as they get involved in research and study, collect scientific information, and consult in-house experts and research reports. However, their competence in analytical techniques keeps them at distance from the original ideal-type of policy analyst (Mayer et al., 2004). Equally, they are much involved in the provision of advice to their ministers, which relates to ‘client advisors’. Most of their policy work consists in providing information and advice to the ministers and their cabinet members, but they are only rarely involved in the selection of options and final decisions.

The results of this study confirm the findings made by previous empirical studies about policy work, in Canada and other countries. First, implementing policies is the most frequently reported task by the regional Canadian policy workers (Wellstead and Stedman, 2010: 902; Wellstead, Stedman, and Lindquist, 2009: 34). The second most frequent task is preparing briefing notes or position papers to managers and decision makers (Howlett and Newman, 2010: 132). Third, relational techniques are used more than formal techniques, which confirm that the use of sophisticated analytical methods is exaggerated (Howlett et al., 2015). In Canada, civil servants adopt a client-advice style rather than a rational style (Howlett, 2009: 11). They are more deeply committed in policy formulation than Belgian Francophones are.

Governments rely much on in-house information and expertise. Like in other countries, this study on Francophone Belgium confirms that in-house communication and exchanges are still predominant. The levels of interaction outside of the immediate environment are limited, even with other governments (Evans and Wellstead, 2013; Howlett and Newman, 2010: 130;

Wellstead, Stedman and Lindquist, 2009: 47-48; Evans and Veselý, 2014). This contradicts the hypothesis that the turn to 'new public governance' pushed public servants to engage in greater consultation, consensus building and public dialogue (Prince, 2007; Veselý, Wellstead and Evans, 2014).

Divergent results are certainly influenced by institutional structures, such as the state-society relationships, politico-administrative relation, and the internal organisation of the civil service (Veselý, Wellstead and Evans, 2014; Fleischer, 2009). Contrary to their colleagues in the UK and Germany, Belgian Francophones are more substantive area specialists than 'policy process generalists' (Howlett et al., 2015). Their involvement is lower in evidence-based work and policy analysis than their Canadian counterparts, but they are participating to in-house research and studies, at least more than the Czechs (Veselý, Wellstead and Evans, 2014).

Further comparisons should insist on institutional structures. On the one hand, the politico-administrative relation determines the division of work and the kind of relationship between the ministers and the departments (Hondeghe and Steen, 2013). In the absence of strong ministerial cabinets, ministers involve civil servants more strenuously in the production of policies, as is the case in the Westminster systems. On the other hand, an internal organisation that privileges generalists upon specialists, and recognises policy advisers as a profession may conduct more rigorous and systematic policy analysis and involve more civil servants in the production too. However, this expectation may be tempered by findings from the US where policy analysts are employed in many other tasks than pure analysis only (Hird, 2005; Radin, 2013).

These research may be successfully completed with additional qualitative enquiries on policy work with case studies on the internal trajectory of draft policy programs, noticing the internal process, the decision on the policy rationale, the writing of related texts and the moments of decision (Prince 2007).

A better empirical knowledge of policy work will have great implication for teaching public policy, as well as put the policy concerns back again on the agenda of administrative reforms.

Bibliography

Bourgon, J. (2010) ‘The history and future of nation-building? Building capacity for public results’, *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 76(2): 197-218.

Brans, M., De Peuter, B. and Ferraro, G. (2012) 'Policy work old and new: Challenges to bureaucratic policy work as a craft', *Organization Studies Summer Workshop*, Rhodes, Greece, 24-26 May.

Brans, M., de Visscher, C., Gouglas, A. and Jaspers, S. (2017) 'Political control and bureaucratic expertise: Policy analysis by ministerial cabinet members', in: Brans, M., Aubin, D. (eds) *Policy analysis in Belgium*, Bristol: Policy Press.

Colebatch, H. (2006) 'What work makes policy?', *Policy Sciences* 39(4): 309-321.

Colebatch, H., Hoppe, R. and Noordegraaf, M. (eds) (2010) *Working for policy*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 264.

Colebatch, H. and Radin, B. (2006) 'Mapping the work of policy', in: Colebatch, H. (ed) *The work of policy: An international survey*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 217-226.

Connaughton, B. (2015) 'Navigating the borderlines of politics and administration: Reflections on the role of ministerial advisers', *International Journal of Public Administration* 38(1): 37-45.

Craft, J. and Howlett, M. (2012) 'Policy formulation, governance shifts and policy influence: Location and content in policy advisory systems', *Journal of Public Policy* 32(2): 79-98.

Craft, J. and Wilder, M. (2017), ‘Catching a second wave: Context and compatibility in advisory system dynamics’, *Policy Studies Journal* 45(1): 215-239.

- De Visscher, C. and Houlberg Salomonsen, H. (2013) 'Explaining differences in ministerial "ménages à trois": Multiple bargains in Belgium and Denmark', *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 79(1): 71-90.
- Dobuzinskis, L., Howlett, M. and Laycock, D. (eds) (2007) *Policy analysis in Canada: The state of the art*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Dunn, W. (2008) *Public policy analysis, an introduction*, 4th ed, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Evans, B. and Veselý, A. (2014) 'Contemporary policy work in subnational governments and NGOs: Comparing evidence from Australia, Canada and the Czech Republic', *Policy and Society* 33(1): 77-87.
- Evans, B. and Wellstead, A. (2013) 'Policy dialogue and engagement between non-governmental organizations and government: A survey of processes and instruments of Canadian policy workers', *Central European Journal of Public Policy* 7(1): 60-87.
- Fleischer, J. (2009) 'Power resources of parliamentary executives: Policy advice in the UK and Germany', *West European Politics* 32(1): 196-214.
- Flyvbjerg, B. (2006) 'Five misunderstandings about case-study research', *Qualitative Inquiry* 12(2): 219-245.
- Gregory, R. and Lonti, Z. (2008) 'Chasing shadows? Performance measurement of policy advice in New Zealand government departments', *Public Administration* 86(3): 837-56.
- Halligan, J. (1995) 'Policy advice and the public service', in: Peters, B.G., Savoie, D. (eds) *Governance in a changing environment*, Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 138-172.
- Hird, J. (2005) *Power, knowledge and politics. Policy analysis in the states*, Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

- Hondeghem, A. and Steen, T. (2013) 'Evolving public service bargains for top officials: Some international comparisons', *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 79(1): 3-8.
- Hoppe, R. and Jeliaskova, M. (2006) 'How policy workers define their job: A Netherlands case study', in: Colebatch, H. (ed), *The work of policy: An international survey*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 35-60.
- Howlett, M. (2009) 'Policy advice in multi-level governance systems: Sub-national policy analysts and analysis', *International Review of Public Administration* 13(1): 1-16.
- Howlett, M. (2015) 'Policy analytical capacity: The supply and demand for policy analysis in government', *Policy and Society* 34(3-4): 173-182.
- Howlett, M. and Newman, J. (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(2): 123-136.
- Howlett, M., Tan, S.L., Migone, A., Wellstead, A. and Evans, B. (2015) 'Policy formulation, policy advice policy appraisal: The distribution of analytical tools ', in: Jordan, A., Turnpenny, J. (eds) *The tools of policy formulation. Actors, capacities, venues and effects*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 163-183.
- Howlett, M. and Wellstead, A. (2012) 'Professional policy work in federal states: Institutional autonomy and Canadian policy analysis', *Canadian Public Administration* 55(1): 53-68.
- Kohoutek, J., Nekola, M. and Novotný, V. (2013) 'Conceptualizing policy work as activity and field of research', *Central European Journal of Public Policy* 7(1): 28-59.
- Lindquist, E. and Desvaux, J. (2007) 'Policy analysis and bureaucratic capacity: Context, competencies, and strategies', in: Dobuzinskis, L., Howlett, M., Laycock, D. (eds) *Policy analysis in Canada: The state of the art*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 116-142.
- Maybin, J. (2015) 'Policy analysis and policy know-how: A case study of civil servants in England's department of Health', *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis* 17(3): 286-304.

- 1
2
3 Mayer, I., van Daalen, C. and Bots, P. (2004) 'Perspectives on policy analysis: A framework
4 for understanding and design', *International Journal of Technology, Policy and Management*
5
6 4(1): 169-191.
7
8
9 McCandless, S. and Guy, M. (2013) 'One more time', *Administrative Theory & Praxis* 35(3):
10
11 356-377.
12
13 Meltsner, A. (1976) *Policy analysts in the bureaucracy*, Berkeley: University of California
14
15 Press.
16
17 Newman, J. (2017) 'Policy analysis in sub-national governments', in: Brans, M., Howlett, M.,
18
19 Geva-May, I. (eds) *Routledge handbook on comparative policy analysis*, 118-130.
20
21
22 OECD (2011) *Ministerial advisors: Role, influence and management*, Paris: OECD
23
24 Publishing.
25
26 Öhberg, P., Christiansen, P. and Niklasson, B. (2017) 'Administrative politicization or
27
28 contestability? How political advisers affect neutral competence in policy processes', *Public*
29
30 *Administration* 95(1): 269-285.
31
32
33 Page, E. and Jenkins, B. (2005) *Policy bureaucracy: Government with a cast of thousands*,
34
35 Oxford: Oxford University Press.
36
37 Prince, M. (2007) 'Soft craft, hard choices, altered context: Reflections on twenty-five years
38
39 of policy advice in Canada', in: Dobuzinskis, L., Howlett, M., Laycock, D. (eds) *Policy*
40
41 *analysis in Canada: The state of the art*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 163-185.
42
43
44 Radin, B. (2013) *Beyond Machiavelli: Policy analysis reaches midlife*, Washington, DC:
45
46 Georgetown University Press.
47
48 Svara, J. (2001) 'The myth of the dichotomy: Complementarity of politics and administration
49
50 in the past and future of public administration', *Public Administration Review* 61(2): 176-183.
51
52
53 Veselý, A. (2017) 'Policy advice as policy work: A conceptual framework for multi-level
54
55 analysis', *Policy Sciences* 50(1): 139-154.
56
57
58
59
60

Vesely, A., Wellstead, A. and Evans, B. (2014) ‘Comparing sub-national policy workers in Canada and the Czech Republic: Who they are, what they do, and why it matters?’, *Policy and Society* 33(2): 103-115.

Weimer, D. and Vining, A. (2010) *Policy analysis: Concepts and practice*, 5th ed, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

Wellstead, A. and Stedman, R. (2010) ‘Policy capacity and incapacity in Canada's Federal Government’, *Public Management Review* 12(6): 893-910.

Wellstead, A., Stedman, R. and Lindquist, E. (2009) ‘The nature of regional policy work in Canada's federal public service’, *Canadian Political Science Review* 3(1): 34-56.

Table 1 Policy advisory styles

	Fact-driven/Rational	Political/Normative
Issue-specific	Rational technicians (1)	Client advisors (3)
Process	Process generalists (2)	Democratic issue advocates (4)

Source: Adapted from Nekola and Kohoutec (2016)

For Peer Review

Figure 1 Time devoted to policy work (N=849, $\alpha=0.61$)

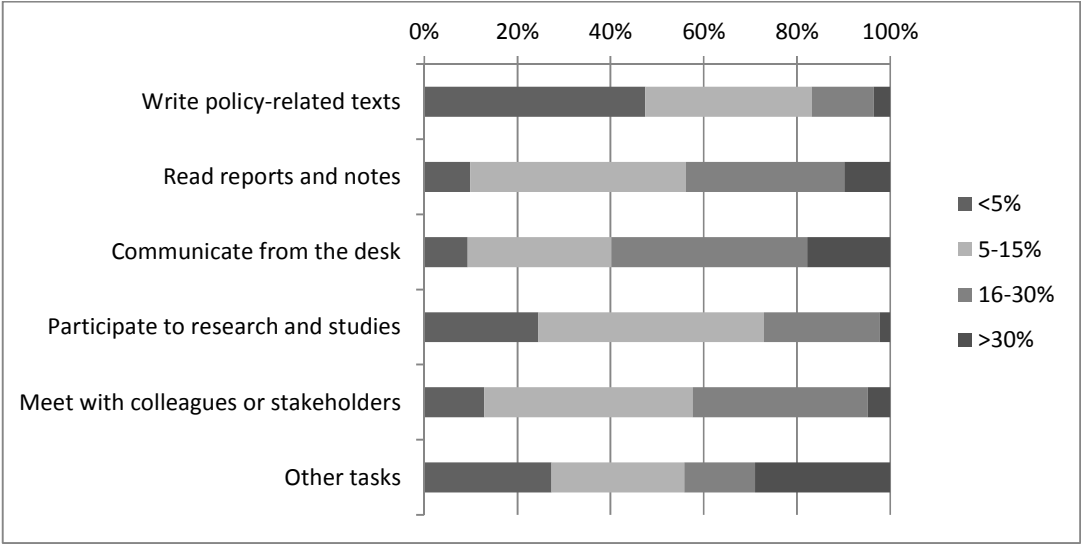


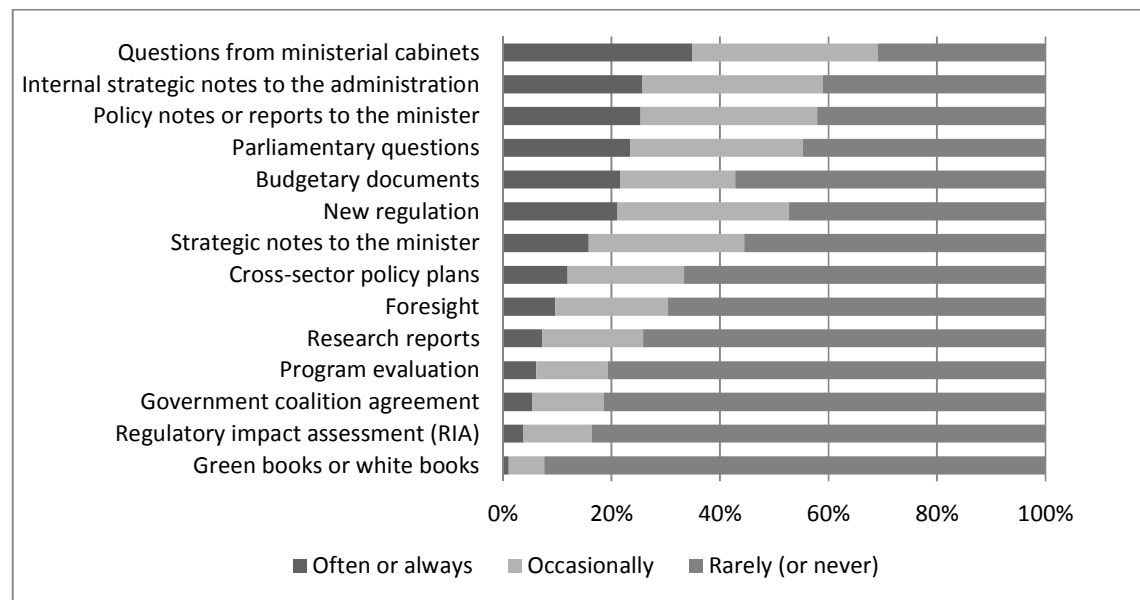
Figure 2 Involvement in the preparation of policy documents (N=934, $\alpha=0.89$)

Figure 3 Involvement in policy-related tasks (N=916, $\alpha=0.87$)

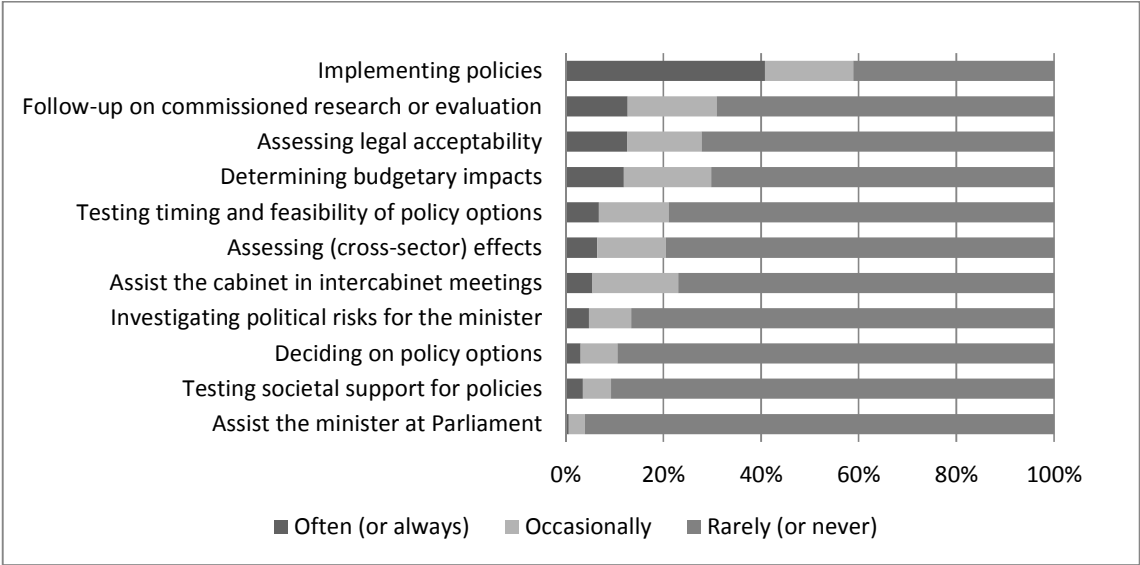


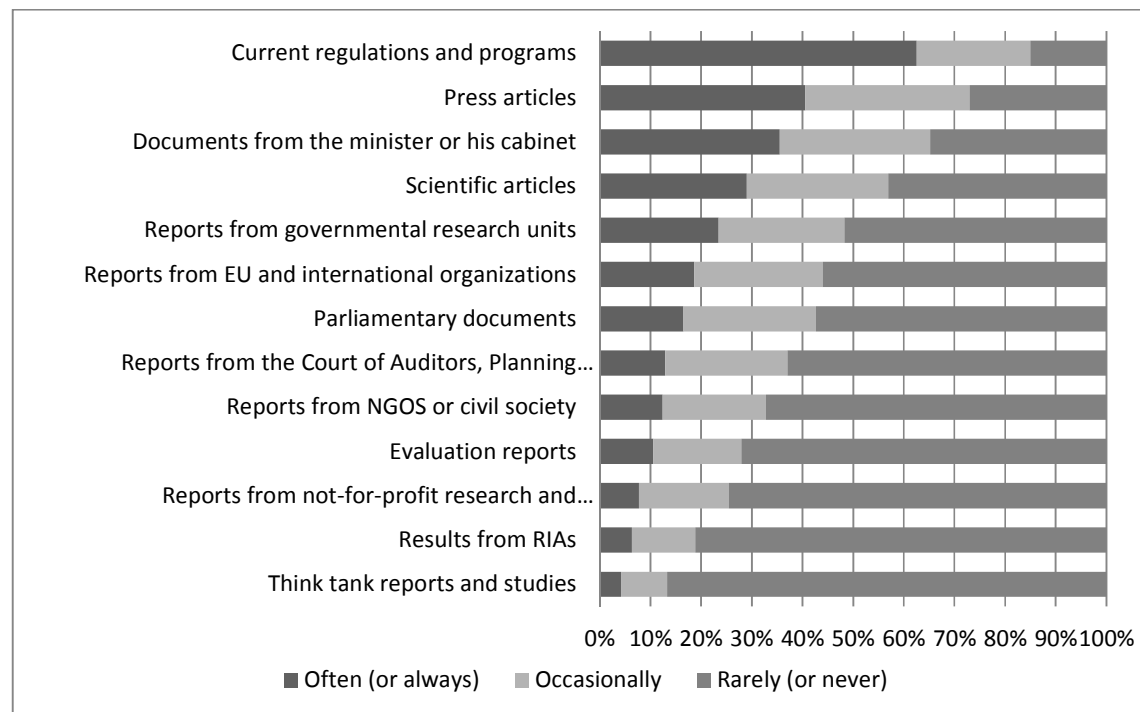
Figure 4 Information sources used in policy work (N=759, $\alpha=0.88$)

Figure 5 Advice requested or received

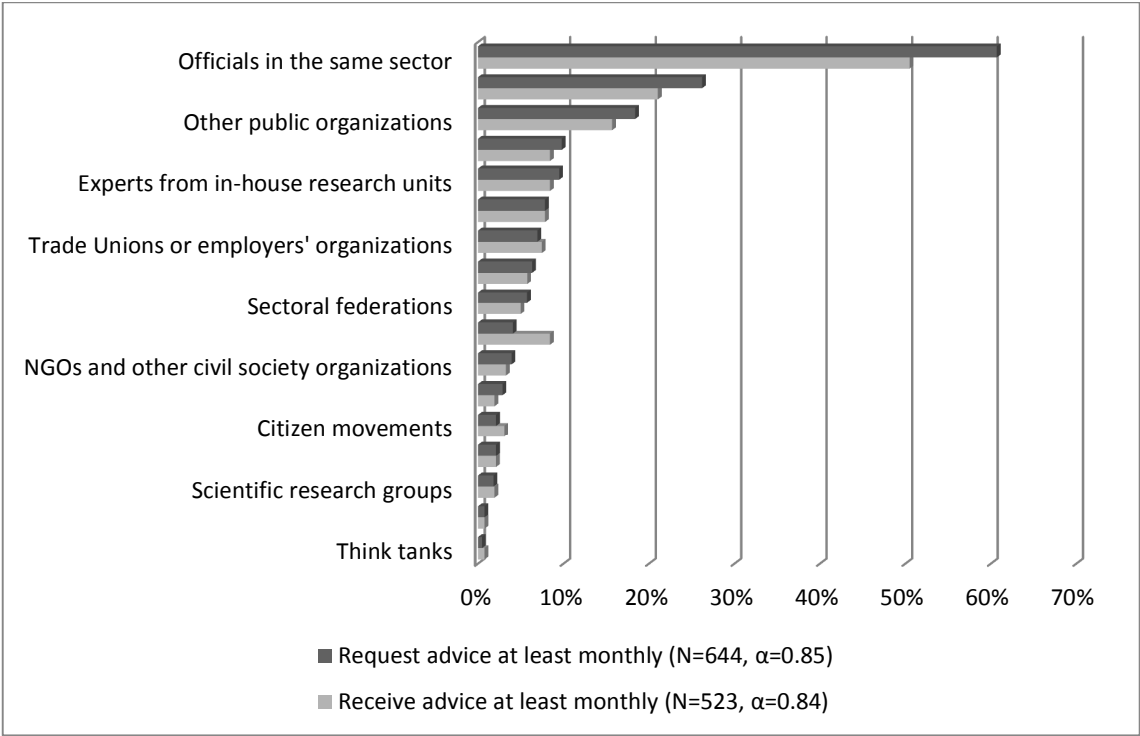


Figure 6 Use of analytical techniques (N=763, $\alpha=0.88$)