



Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)

...is a forum that encourages debate on a wide range of research findings, with the overall aim of promoting evidence-based policy and law-making within Northern Ireland



Policy making at the local level: Everyday policy making in our local councils

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Overview

Research Question:

When greater powers are to be devolved to our new super councils, what type of institutions will inherit these powers and how will these powers be used?

Case study: Belfast City Council

Why? It is not enough to understand what policy/ies to implement but we need to know how good policy can be implemented

Findings:

- I Bureaucrats have discretion in certain policy areas
- II This discretion is exercised differently by different bureaucrats but two similar typologies emerge
- III Belfast City Council is very competent and demonstrates a high level of professionalism within its administration

Implications for policy:

Council (case of Belfast) is competent to deal with complex societal and governance problems

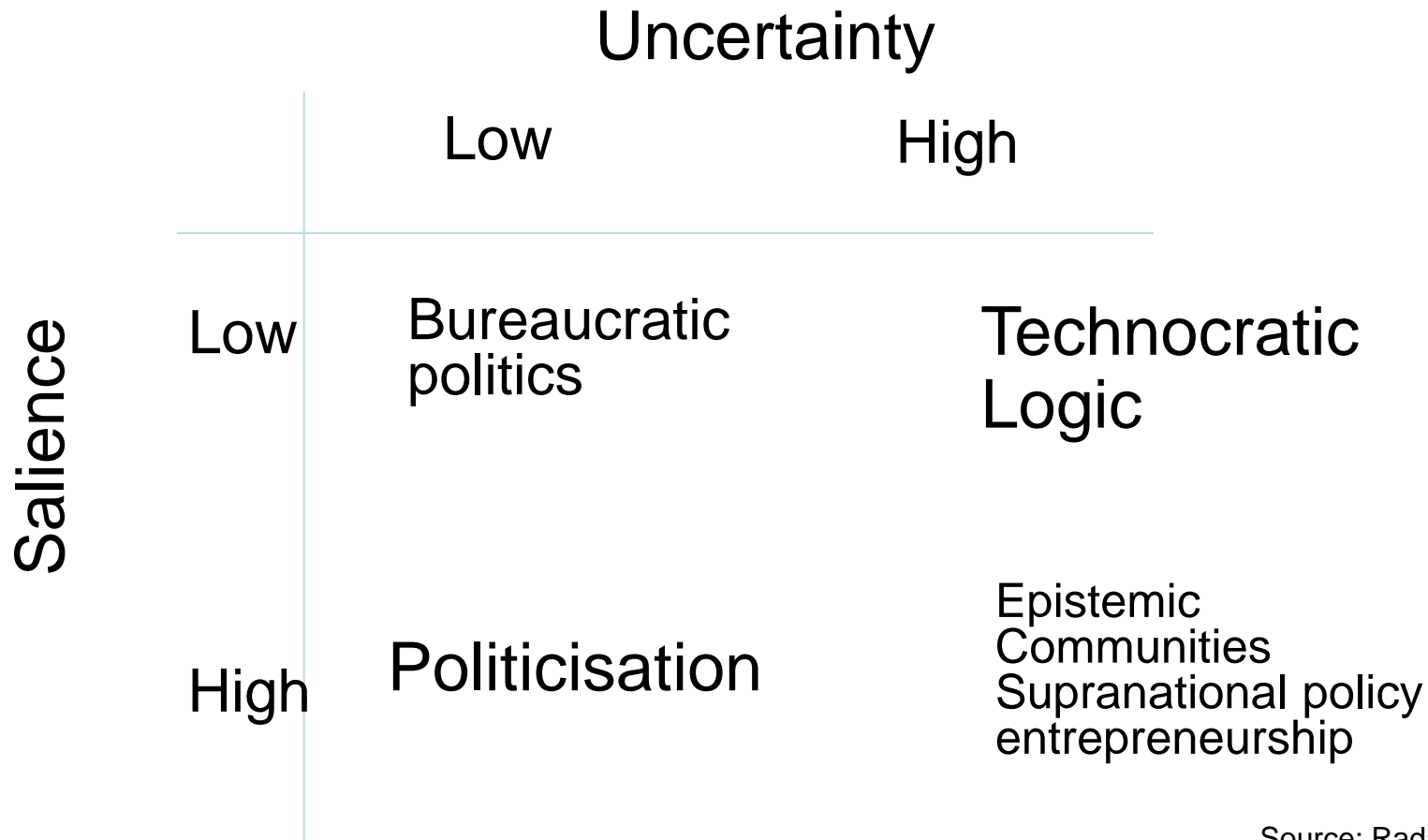
Studying public administration is important – we need to invest in administrative capacity

Further research:

The design of bureaucratic institutions is fundamental to conflict management, yet we know very little about how a bureaucracy within a contested society should look



Policy typologies



Source: Radaelli (1999)

Decision Typologies (Belfast)

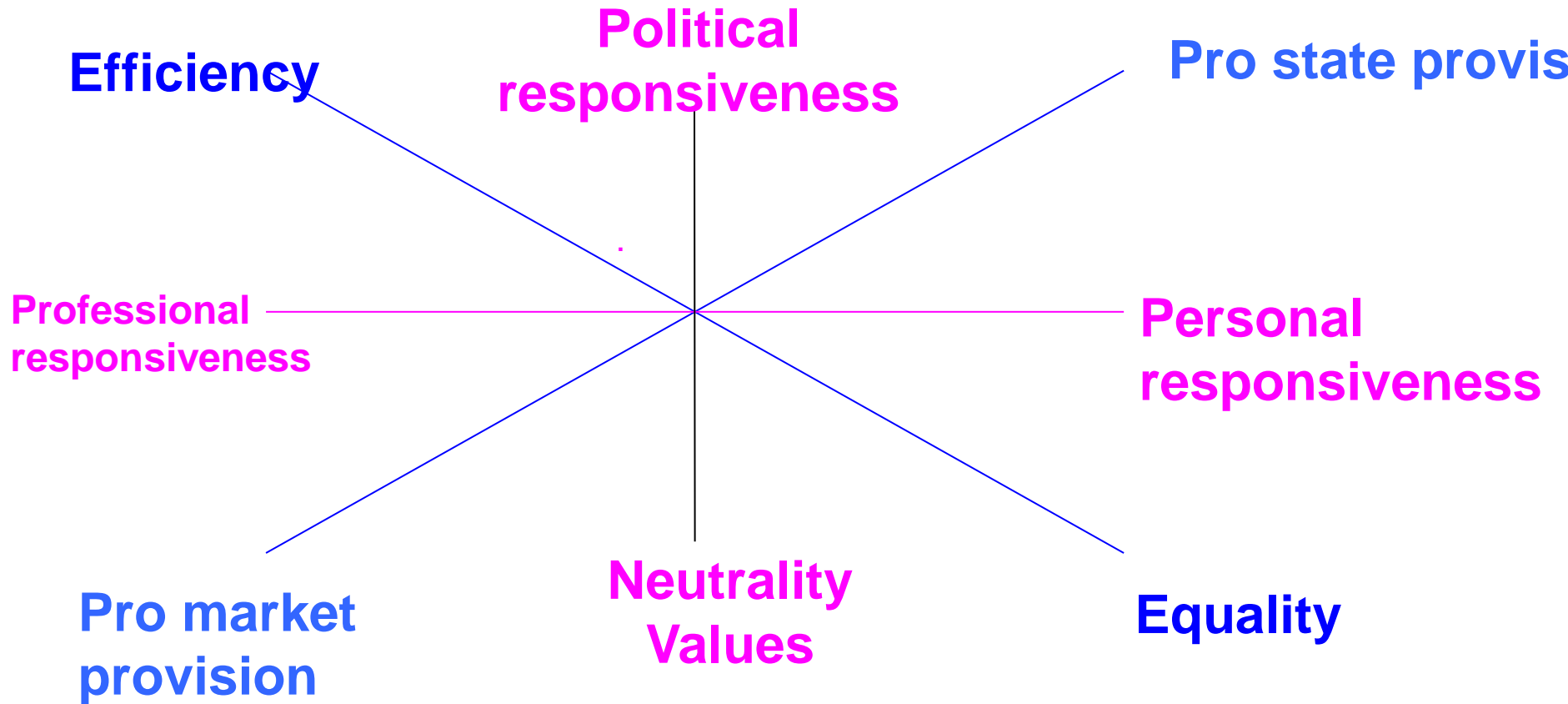
- Decision Type A: Low public interest
- Decision Type B: Low Technical Complexity, High Public Interest, One-off Decisions
- Decision Type C: Low Technical Complexity, High Public Interest, Day-to-Day Decisions

	Decision Type A: Low public interest	Decision Type B: Low Technical Complexity, High Public Interest, One-off Decisions	Decision Type C: Low Technical Complexity, High Public Interest, Day-to-Day Decisions
Actor with most influence on the decision-making process	Bureaucratic elite. Bureaucrat relies on regulation and the law to inform decision making.	Political level. Bureaucratic elite can influence process but this is trumped by that of the political level	Bureaucratic elite with indirect influence from political level. Bureaucratic elite balance technical criteria with what is politically saleable
Actor with most influence on agenda setting	Bureaucratic elite with occasional influence from individual Councillors	Both political and bureaucratic elite involved in setting the agenda. If bureaucratic elite set agenda this is usually due to a statutory requirement	Both political and bureaucratic elite. Political level advance the concerns of their constituents while administrators advance the needs of the entire urban population
Actor with most influence on outcomes	Bureaucratic elite. Where possible bureaucrats will keep some money for Councillor's wishes but this money is allocated at bureaucrat's discretion	While the bureaucratic elite try and influence outcomes, the political level make the bureaucrat elite act in ways they otherwise would not	While the bureaucratic elite have maximum influence on policy outcomes, policy is developed within the context of the political structures of the Council
Primary guidance in decision-making	Technical criteria and regulation	Political criteria. Bureaucrat tries to influence but often unsuccessful	Both technical criteria and political saleability are balanced

Key Findings I

- Discretion exists
- It exists in some policy areas more than others
- Discretion does not mean that bureaucrat simply implements their own preferences
- **So what?**
 - How is this discretion exercised?

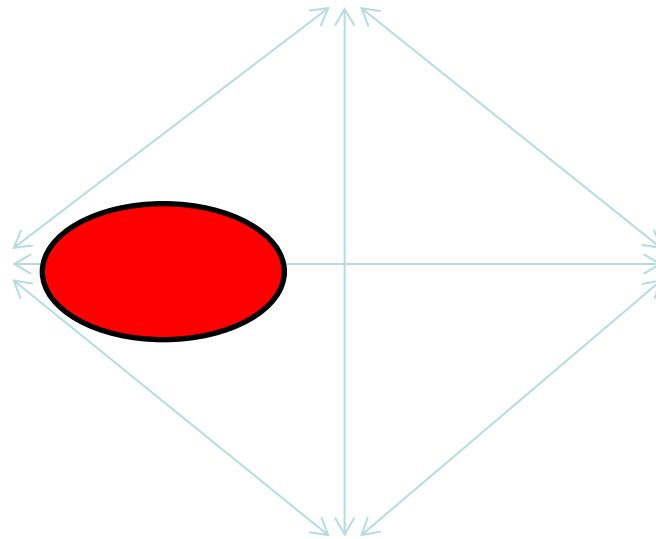
Theoretical framework: quick overview



F1:
Representation
Web

Political
responsiveness

Professional
representatio
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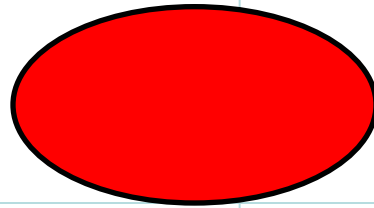


Personal
representation

Neutrality
values

F1: Core
Governance
Beliefs

State provision
of services



equity

efficiency

State facilitation
of services

Factor One: Key Agree Statements

Administrators are not neutral. They should be committed to good management and social equity as values

I recommend positions that I perceive represent the needs and interests of the entire urban public

As I am involved in policy-making, it is my role to advance the needs of those less well off in society, regardless of their background

I take initiative in proposing policies, mobilising support for these policies and questioning policies that may run counter to the general public interest

The best way to ensure efficient public service to the entire urban public is through public sector reform so that services may be provided equitably and efficiently by the public sector

In my daily work I value the views of international organisations such as the OECD, EU, World Bank, Policy-specific think tanks and NGOs etc



Factor one: Interview statements

‘It is only when we bring things to the attention of the political level that they have influence’ (Interview 1)

‘There is an incapacity at the political level to deal with the more technical stuff’ (Interview 2)

‘I only present an options paper when cuts are to be political’ (Interview 4)

‘My area is quite technical...the political level rubber stamp my decisions’ (Interview 5)

‘I view my role as a coordinator...I put things in a framework in which they can agree’ (Interview 9)

‘My role is to steer them [political level] in the right way’ (Interview 12)

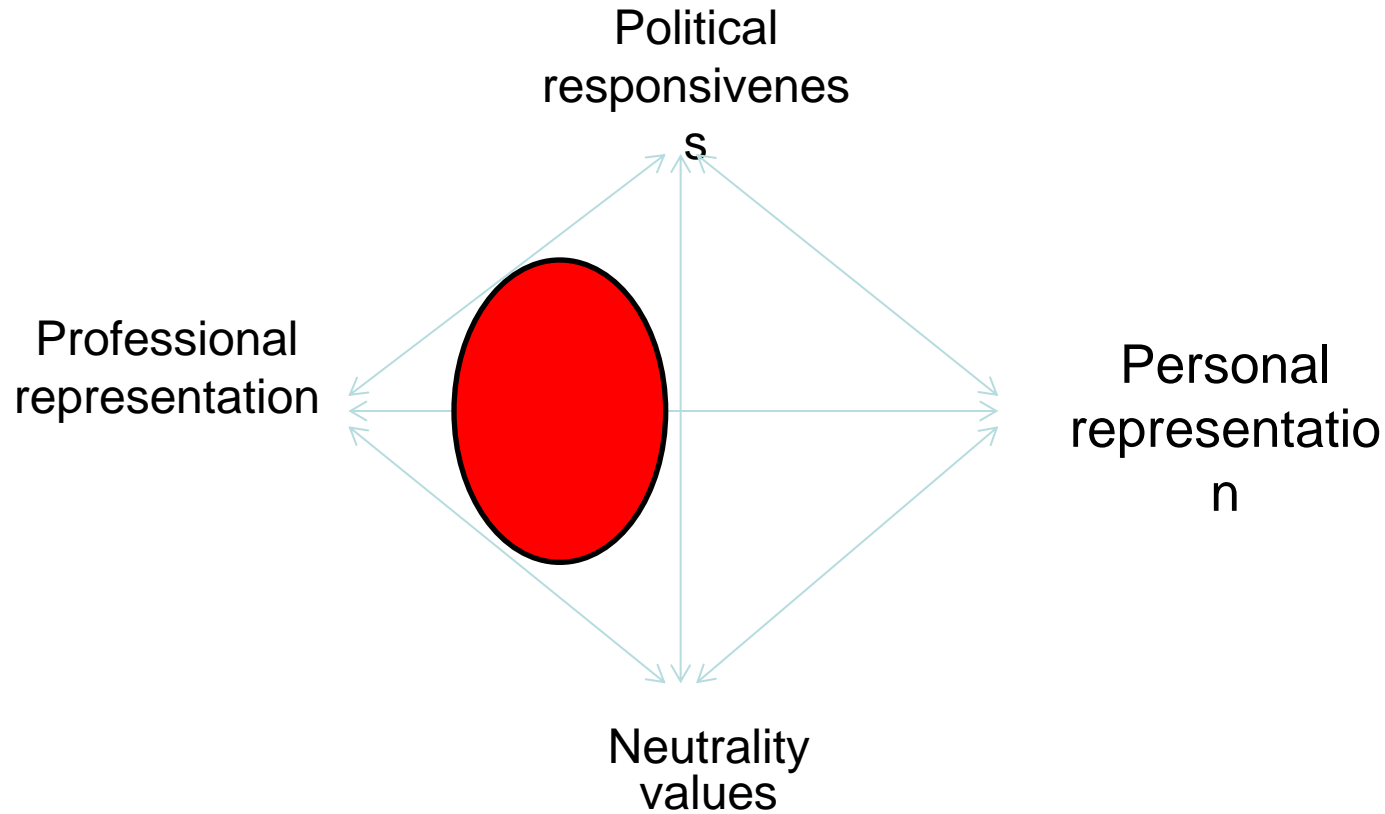
‘I have a broader view for the city, as opposed to a political view’ (Interview 15)

‘My role is to manage the decision-making process’ (Interview 17)

‘You have to do your homework before Council meetings...I build a relationship with Councillors so they may have confidence in me’ (Interview 19)



F2: Representation n Web



F2: Core
Governance
Beliefs

State
provision of
services

equity



efficiency

State
facilitation
of
services



Factor Two: Key Agree Statements

In my daily work, I represent the elected government of the city

My role is to carry out the wishes of the urban government

My decisions are legitimate as I follow procedures established by law and/or secondary legislation

Bureaucracies should be staffed by professionally trained, technically competent individuals. The most qualified person should always get the job.

When there is a conflict of interest arises between the wishes of the urban government and my own expert beliefs, I automatically and unquestionably follow the wishes of the government.

I recommend or actively activate in favour of policy positions that I perceive represent the needs of the entire urban public.



Factor two: Interview statements

- ‘If ABC is good for the economy but not a priority for the political level, I adjust it’ (Interview 20)
- ‘I meet with the political level to determine what their priorities are or knowing where they are at...I need to know what tactic to deploy’ (Interview 20)
- ‘When Councillors disagree I retreat to the evidence’ (Interview 18)
- ‘provided I show rational for decisions, I have no problems with Councillors’ (Interview 16)
- ‘Generally I like to give a recommendation to Councillors, if there are a number of options I will discuss it with individual Councillors before hand’ (Interview 16)
- ‘I keep the debate technical’ (Interview 14)
- ‘Our role is to inform, not to take decisions’ (Interview 7)
- ‘My role is to make sure they take a fully informed decision’ (Interview 8)
- ‘Primary value of the administration is neutrality’ (Interview 8)
- ‘There is always a technical basis for decisions’ (Interview 14)
- ‘Equity is so mainstream today, it is no longer a major concern’ (Interview 18)
- ‘We come up with a policy, test it and the political level endorse it’ (Interview 3)



Details of the findings

- Factor alignment does not correlate with national identity or religious affiliation
- A number of core governance beliefs held by all respondents
 - Equity is more important than efficiency (however marginal difference in how equity is interpreted)
 - Both factors have a commitment to good governance and not willing to follow the rules of the bureaucracy under all circumstances
 - They do not perceive their roles as simply providing input with their expertise or providing advice but as *co-producers* within the policy process
 - Both factors involved in the CM process and consider mediation between differing political and policy perspectives to be a role
 - Political neutrality and impartiality are of paramount importance

Conclusions

Policy contribution:

Insight into decision-making within BCC

Discretion available to officials within BCC

High level of competence within BCC

Two general types of official within BCC

As values guide behaviour, we can now tailor policy programmes that work with, as opposed to against, those charged with implementing policy





Northern Ireland
Assembly



Queen's University
Belfast



The Open
University



Ulster
University

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