

**When Do New Agency Chief Executives Make a Difference to Policies and Performance? A Theoretical Model of Insider/outsider Distinctiveness in the Public Sector\***

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**Abstract**

The literature on chief executive succession suggests that effects on organizational policies and performance are contingent. An important contingency assessed in the private sector is insider or outsider origin of the chief executive within the same organisation or the same sector of activity. This paper extends the theory of insider/outside differences within the public sector. It develops definitions based on an appointee being an insider or outsider to the individual organisation, and an insider or outsider on match in the publicness of the organisation and publicness of his/her previous managerial experience. The publicness dimensions are based on public ownership, with associated internal accountability structures, and public funding. Empirical implications of the theory are suggested for the context of UK central government agencies. This context offers a valuable opportunity to evaluate the theory because of the diversity in degree of publicness in these organisations and the availability of a common framework of performance assessment and statements of agency policy.

\* Authors are listed alphabetically: All make an equal contribution to this paper

## **When Do New Agency Chief Executives Make a Difference to Policies and Performance? A Theoretical Model of Insider/outsider Distinctiveness in the Public Sector**

Chief executive succession is believed to have major consequences for an organisation's mission and performance. However, in contrast to extensive research on private firms (for reviews see: Kellerman and Webster, 2001; Giambatista, Rowe and Riaz, 2005; Finkelstein, Hambrick and Cannella, 2009) there is much less work on this topic in the public sector (Boyne and Dahya, 2002; O'Toole and Meier 2003; Boyne et al., 2008, 2009; Hill 2005; Rainey and Thompson 2006; Riccucci 1995a, 1995b; Williams and Kellough 2006). Researchers are increasingly recognizing that succession effects on performance are contingent (Giambatista, Rowe and Riaz 2005) and the relevant question is not 'does executive succession have impacts?' but, instead, 'when does executive succession have impacts and on what aspects of policy and performance?'. A factor noted as important in the private sector is the role of previous managerial experience as an insider or outsider to the organisation or sector in which the organisation works (Carson et al. 2007; Karaevli, 2007). However, this issue has largely been neglected in the public sector context.

In this paper, we develop a theory of insider/outsider difference and succession for the public sector, originating in the fundamental concept of organisational publicness (Allison, 1979; Bozeman, 1987; Nutt and Backoff 1993; Boyne, 2002; Richards and Smith, 2002; O'Toole and Meier, 2006). We derive empirical implications for the context of UK central state executive agencies which exhibit diversity in the publicness of their chief executives' previous experience. Under 'new public management' reforms, the traditional closed civil service has been opened up to outsiders from the broader public and private sectors (James, 2003; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004; Hood and Lodge 2006). The executive agencies are subject to a common framework for stating their missions and for performance assessment which assists the analysis of succession impacts. There has been surprising little work on chief executives in the context of executive agencies, despite them employing about 60 per cent of civil servants in the UK and similar organisational forms being apparent in many OECD countries (James, 2001; 2003; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2003; Pollitt and Talbot, 2004; Moynihan 2006).

## **Chief executive succession and insider/outsider origins**

The chief executive role entails being in overall managerial control of an organisation with an associated significant personal contribution to strategic management and personalised accountability for organisational performance to stakeholders (Mintzberg, 1975; Norburn, 1989). Chief executive succession has been noted as important in changing organisational policies and performance in both the private sector (Kellerman and Webster, 2001; Giambatista, Rowe and Riaz, 2005; Finkelstein, Hambrick and Cannella, 2009) and the public sector (Ricucci 1995a; 1995b; Boyne and Dahya, 2002; Boyne et al., 2008, 2009; Boyne and Meier 2009).

We plan to examine impact on organisations' policies in terms of the stated mission for each organisation. There has been increased interest in coding organisation missions in recent years to assess the degree of change in policies (Weiss and Piderit 1999). We take a multi-dimensional approach to the definition of performance based on the concerns of key stakeholders. These stakeholders differ across sectors and jurisdictions. However, in the context of the set of UK central government executive agencies we examine, ministers are key stakeholders. The organisations are primarily directly accountable to them both formally and in practice, with formally agreed targets between agencies and their 'parent' ministerial departments (James 2003).

The first dimension of performance we examine is resource input to the organisation, looking at administrative costs, total programme costs and total staff of the organisation. We further examine administrative cost as a proportion of total cost. In UK central government, as in many countries, costs are especially important for ministers in the current fiscal climate. Agency chief executives are formally designated accounting officers or additional accounting officers for their individual agencies so financial performance has particular salience for these officials.

Second, we examine progress against goals valued by the stakeholders. All executive agencies are subject to a regime of performance targets agreed with ministers, which are now incorporated in overarching 'Public Service Agreements'

for the whole government (James 2004). Whilst the targets have changed from time to time, the proportion of targets met provides a useful measure of performance against dimensions agreed as important with a key stakeholder. This is a similar approach to examining performance to that adopted in the United States using the federal government's PART scores (Lewis, 2007; Gilmour and Lewis, 2006a, 2006b), which also compares effectiveness between different areas of government on the basis of target achievement.

Third, we measure media coverage of agencies as an alternative measure of performance of interest to ministers, using a measure of net positive stories about the agency in national newspapers. Ministers' concern with media coverage of central government is longstanding but has increased in recent decades (Hindmoor 2004; Hood, Jennings, Hogwood, Dixon and Beeston 2009).

For each aspect of mission and performance we plan to analyse the effect of chief executive succession. Change in mission following a chief executive succession is a long running theme in succession research in the private sector. New leaders are associated with innovation or adaptation to new circumstances compared to existing leaders who tend to continue established practices because they are unwilling or unable to make changes. This impact has been found in many contexts (Miller 1991; Finkelstein, Hambrick and Cannella, 2009). In the public sector, the context and constraints differ from the private sector but the theoretical expectation is the same, that succession is associated with more change in mission than where succession is absent.

There are two main models that produce general implications for a change in performance resulting from succession: the adaptive and the disruptive models. The adaptive model takes a heroic view of leadership, suggesting that a single individual can alter the fate of an organisation by taking actions that improve its performance by being better suited than the old incumbent to current needs (Jackson and Parry, 2001). In contrast, the disruptive model suggests that succession creates uncertainty in organisations, distracts staff from their tasks and leads to lower performance. The consequences of succession may be both adaptive and disruptive and the net effect depends on the balance between the two. However, the net effect has been found to

depend on the previous level of performance (Friedman and Saul, 1991; Miller, 1993; Zhang and Rajagopalan, 2004; Boyne et al., 2009). Overall, succession in organisations is expected to raise performance in poorly performing organisations, because adaption benefits outweigh disruption costs, but worsen performance in organisations that are already performing well because disruption costs outweigh adaption benefits.

The theory of insider/outsider succession suggests that the previous managerial experience of the new chief executive is an important moderator of the relationships between succession and organisational outcomes (Zhang and Rajagopalan, 2004; Carson et al 2007; Karaevli, 2007; Teodoro, 2008). The rest of this section develops the theory of insider/outsider succession contingencies in the public sector and impacts on mission and performance. The first element of the theory is insider/outsider difference between organisational insiders appointed to the chief executive post, whose origin is within the organisation, and those who are outsiders to the organisation. A second, related, strand builds insider/outsider differences on concepts developed from research on the publicness of organisations.

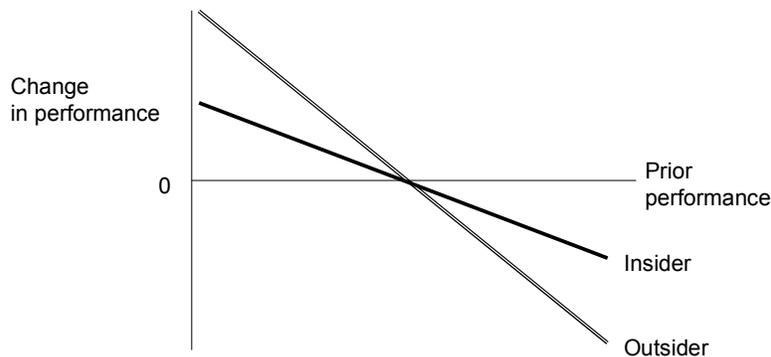
#### **a) Insider/outsider to the individual organisation**

Insiders to the organisation have organisation specific socialisation, knowledge and skills acquired by working within it. Succession theory suggests that simply changing the chief executive brings about changes in agency mission, the strategic goals of the organisation. However, the theory of insider/outsider succession suggests that succession involving appointing an outsider to the organisation is likely to bring about even greater change to mission than succession involving an insider appointment, who are less likely to disrupt established goals and practices (Karaveli, 2007). The insider/outsider moderation of chief executive succession on financial performance follows analogous reasoning to changes in mission. Succession itself is associated with a greater absolute value of change than is non-succession, and succession from outside increases this value still further compared to insider succession.

In other aspects of performance, performance against targets and media coverage, previous research suggests that the effects of succession entail further

contingencies, especially that succession effects depend on the context of prior performance. Succession in the context of high performance disrupts a well performing organisation, whilst succession amongst low performing organisations is likely to be beneficial. However, these effects are compounded by insider/outsider differences. Good performers have been found to be able to grow their own successors to mitigate the negative effects of succession and more succession planning occurs than in weakly performing organizations (Zajac, 1990). Whenever good performers recruit a new chief executive from the outside, the negative effects of succession are more substantial. Therefore outsiders from beyond organisation will harm well performing agencies more than if the succession came from inside the agency itself. In contrast, weak performing organisations have little to lose from giving an outsider a try. Indeed, here outsiders' rather disruptive ways will boost performance more than an insider succession. The relationship between change in performance and prior performance for insider and outsider successions is summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Change in performance and prior performance for insider and outsider successions



Expectations about the differences between an insider or outsider appointed as chief executive to an organisation for all aspects of mission and performance are summarised in Table 1, which presents expectations for good and poor prior performance against targets and media coverage.

**Table 1: Chief executive succession with insider/outsider (to the organisation) appointment**

	Mission	Financial performance	Performance against targets and media coverage
Insider	Changes brought by succession are small	Changes brought by succession are small	Good prior performance: Damage from succession is small Poor prior performance: Benefits from succession are large
Outsider	Changes brought by succession are large	Changes brought by succession are large	Good prior performance: Damage from succession is large Poor prior performance: Benefits from succession are large

**b) Insider/outsider publicness differences**

Current thinking rejects a simple single dichotomy between public and private organisations and instead conceptualizes publicness on several dimensions of difference. There is a consensus that these differences matter for management of organisations, particularly for its strategic management (Allison 1979; Bozeman, 1987; Nutt and Backoff 1993; Boyne, 2002; Richards and Smith 2002; O’Toole and Meier, 2006). Two main dimensions stand out as being commonly examined in this literature and subsume most of the factors identified in the discussion of public/private sector differences. First, the degree of public funding (as opposed to trading in markets). Second, the form of public or private ownership with associated accountability and control structures. Because these dimensions receive a lot of

attention in the existing literature we concentrate on developing the concepts of insider/outsider succession from them.

An example of an organization that scores highly on public funding but is in private (stockholder) ownership is Northrop Grumman, makers of the B-2 stealth bomber and one of the major subcontractors for the F-35 fighter; by far their major customer is the US Pentagon, and for the F-35, the UK Royal Air Force. Yet the company is traded on the stock exchange. An example of an organization that obtains exclusively private funding but that is publicly owned is the US Postal Service. Then there are organizations that are receiving a very high degree of public funding and are in public ownership, for example classic central government departments or German and some UK universities. In Germany, universities are almost all a particular type of agency of the Land/state that they are located in, and which largely depend on state and federal funding because tuition fees are still very low in comparison to the US. The remaining category is of course made up by classical businesses. Drawing on this framework, we suggest that variation in new chief executives' previous experience, both immediate prior experience and over their careers, of managing in public or private organisations is important for understanding insider or outsider succession.

The dimension of public funding suggests relative publicness as the difference in the degree of public funding received by the agency the chief executive succeeds to and the degree of public funding of organisations in which they had previous managerial experience. Greater absolute values of the gap reflect greater difference. In the context of UK central government agencies, there is considerable variety in the degree of public relative to private funding received by these bodies with some receiving the bulk of its income from sales income rather than direct grant.

The expectations for low or high congruence between experience of funding regime and the organisation chief executives are appointed to are presented in Table 2. The outsiders in terms of a lack of match in funding are expected to bring greater change to mission and inputs because of their different experience compared to insiders. However for performance, whilst succession effects are contingent on prior performance, differences in insider or outsider succession are not contingent on prior

performance. Instead, congruence demonstrates prior experience of working in a similar organisational environment, and managerial experience is beneficial for performance.

**Table 2: Chief executive succession with insider/outsider publicness as high/low congruence in public funding**

	Mission	Performance as resource inputs	Performance against targets and media coverage (with, overall, succession damaging good performers but benefiting poor performers)
Insider (high congruence)	Changes brought by succession is small	Changes brought by succession is small	Better performance relative to outsider
Outsider (low congruence)	Changes brought by succession are large	Changes brought by succession are large	Worse performance relative to insider

The dimension of ownership and associated accountability regime suggests differences between categories of ownership. In the context of UK central government agencies the Parliamentary system is characterised by direct accountability to ministers. This sets up a distinction between chief executives with previous experience of working in this system and outsiders to it. Another insider/outsider distinction is between chief executives who have experience of reporting to executive politicians in publicly owned bodies (either in central government or another part of the public sector) and those who do not (having worked in private sector bodies). The implications for mission, inputs and other aspects of performance are summarised in Table 3.

**Table 3: Chief executive succession with insider/outsider publicness as high/low congruence in public ownership/accountability regime**

	Mission	Performance as resource inputs	Performance against targets and media coverage (with, overall, succession damaging good performers but benefiting poor performers)
Insider (congruent)	Changes brought by succession are small	Changes brought by succession are small	Better performance relative to outsider
Outsider (incongruent)	Changes brought by succession are large	Changes brought by succession are large	Worse performance relative to insider

**c) Combining dimensions of insider/outsider difference**

The different dimensions of insider/outsider succession can be combined. An insider appointment from the organisation itself will have complete fit on both dimensions of publicness unless the characteristics of the organisation change around the time of appointment. In the case of insider/outsider publicness, congruence in funding and ownership experience either runs together or against each other. In the former case, the impacts of insider/outsider differences are compounded, in the latter they are reduced, as summarised in Table 4. A number of control variables are necessary for the analysis, including overall length of chief executive experience, education, and characteristics of the organisation which have all been identified in research on succession effects (Finklestein, Hambrick and Cannella 2009). We will also control for previous chief executive experience, because most appointees from inside and organisation will not previously have been chief executives. The modelling strategy will also take advantage of using panel data, which allow us to remove the effect of time invariant unobserved factors affecting performance and to use autoregressive formulations to control for previous values of the dependent variables.

**Table 4: Chief executive succession with combinations of insider/outsider publicness of funding and ownership**

	Mission	Performance as resource inputs	Performance against targets and media coverage (with, overall, succession damaging good performers but benefiting poor performers)
Insider (high congruence on funding and congruent on ownership)	Changes brought by succession are small	Changes brought by succession are small	Best performance relative to mixed insider/outsider groups and single dimension insider groups
Intermediate (low congruence on funding and congruent on ownership)	No effect on changes brought by succession	No effect on changes brought by succession	No effect on performance
Intermediate (high congruence on funding and incongruent on ownership)	No effect on changes brought about by succession	No effect on changes brought about by succession	No effect on performance
Outsider (low congruence on funding and incongruent on ownership)	Changes brought about by succession are large	Changes brought about by succession are large	Worst performance relative to mixed insider/outsider groups and single dimension outsider groups

## **Empirical implications for UK central government agencies**

In this context, chief executives head organisations with specified performance frameworks and managerial freedoms in a system dominated by accountability to government ministers, in contrast to bodies with more formal independence from ministers and primary reporting to other stakeholders including independent boards (Horton and Jones 1996; Hood and Lodge 2006; Flinders 2009). Government policy has been to increase external competition for senior posts to bring in more outsiders from beyond the traditional civil service (Cabinet Office, 1999; HM Government, 2007).

We plan to code information on chief executive succession and the most recent posting and overall managerial experience. We will further code individual agencies on publicness dimensions and combine this information to form the dimensions of insider/outsider congruence. An indicator of the publicness of the funding dimension is the proportion of total expenditure of the agency that comes from charging users rather than from government grant. We will cross-check findings with a related measure using dummy variables for distinctions between agencies that are trading funds (with management freedoms to raise income) and those that are not, and between those agencies which are net funding regimes and are able to retain income they generate and other agencies.

In assessing the consequences of agencies for mission, we concentrate on changes to the stated key priorities for the agency as set out in their key mission objectives in annual reports. The coding of agency mission is consistent with recent work on British central government which has sought to code broad policy agendas for governments (John and Jennings 2009; Jennings and John 2009). We use several measures of performance:

### *Performance 1: resource inputs*

We use data on administrative costs (£m), and administrative costs as a percentage of total agency spending. The funding regimes for agencies vary but information about their expenditure on their own costs and the programmes they handle is obtainable from departmental and agency annual reports.

*Performance 2: performance target achievement*

We use data on target achievement from agencies departmental reports and the reviews of overall agency performance.

*Performance 3: media coverage*

The performance information will be complemented by analysis of media reporting of agencies, because of politicians' interest in media coverage of central government activities. For an example a similar approach to media analysis in the context of economic policy see Goidel and Langley (1995). UK newspaper coverage of each agency will be assessed each year for each agency, coded positive, negative or neutral and a net score calculated. Information is available from the Lexis Nexis database of newspapers.

**Discussion and conclusions**

This paper seeks to advance a theory of insider/outsider succession for the public sector drawing on differences between an organisational insider and outsider, and congruence in public ownership and public funding. Despite anecdotes about chief executives there is currently little systematic work on whether the UK system has been opened up to outsiders and what the effects have been on agency mission and performance have been. Our preliminary analysis has begun to map succession events in the late 1990s and suggests a turnover rate of just under one half of all chief executives each year, which is substantially higher than in other sectors such as local government. Of new appointments, from those that we have so far coded, about one third were from outside the central government civil service system. Some illustrative examples are given below:

**The private sector outsider:** Derek Lewis was appointed as chief executive of HM Prison Service executive agency in 1992 and held the post for almost three years. The Prison Service is high on public funding and entails accountability to the Secretary of State in the Home Office ministry. He was an outsider to the organisation and highly incongruent on both dimensions of funding and ownership. His previous managerial experience was in the Ford Motor Company, Imperial Group and Granada TV. The

performance of the agency did not clearly suffer in terms of targets but there was considerable negative media reporting towards the end of his tenure and a high profile dispute with the supervising minister, the Home Secretary, which led him to be removed from his post. Later he sued for wrongful dismissal. The Government managed to settle with him out of court.

**The central government and agency insider:** Richard Tilt was appointed chief executive of HM Prison Service in 1995 following Derek Lewis's removal from post. He was an insider to the Prison Service and spent his managerial career in the service. He was brought in as a 'safe pair of hands' at a time of substantial adverse media reporting and conflict with politicians, performance did appear to improve over the period he was in post (he left the post in 1999).

**The central government outsider but public sector insider:** Simon Hodgson was appointed chief executive of Forestry Commission England in 2005 and is currently still in post. He was an outsider to the organisation, and outsider to central government but an insider to the public sector, having been a former director of the West Midlands Regional Assembly and South West Regional Development Agency. His managerial experience gives him congruence in funding because large portions of development agency income are from sales and working with the private sector. The performance of the agency has been good in terms of targets and media reporting.

Our research seeks to place these cases within a more systematic analysis of succession effects. Extensions to the analysis presented here will consider whether succession effects are different at different periods in the history of an agency, for example taking over from the first ever chief executive of an organisation rather than taking over a well established organisation. The interaction between changes in mission and changes in performance also offers an interesting set of possible research questions, with performance improvement perhaps being more challenging at a time of substantial change to an organisation's mission.

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