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Introduction

FINDING VOICE

Is politics broken? The dramatic events of the past decade have left many commentators convinced that there is something decidedly abnormal going on. A series of shocks—both economic and geopolitical—have combined to generate a ‘perfect storm’ of popular disquiet with democratically elected leaders around much of the world. First, the global financial crisis of the late noughties stung the world economy. Trailing in its wake has been a gradual but cumulatively dramatic increase in wealth inequality. Works such as Thomas Piketty’s *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* have struck an unexpectedly deep popular chord with people convinced that the financial bargain between elites and the rest is no longer holding.

Over the same period, the long civil war in Syria and continued unrest in north Africa has fuelled new waves of refugees desperately striving to find safety in Europe. Their arrival has added to popular disquiet about immigration levels across the continent, triggering intense public debate about their impact on the social and economic life of the EU and its constituent nations. That disquiet has blended with new fears about security to create a more hostile environment towards immigrants than Europe has seen at any time since World War Two. Irregular but not infrequent terrorist attacks have added to the nervousness that perhaps nation states are not able to keep

their citizens as safe as they once could, giving further impetus to public calls on the need for better ‘border security’.

These events have provided the backdrop to some undeniably seismic political moments. In the USA, Donald Trump was elected president despite breaking almost every established rule in American politics about how to run for the nation’s highest office. He openly insulted iconic war heroes, from Senator John McCain to Humayan Khan. He belittled opponents in the Democratic and Republican parties alike with labels like ‘crooked Hillary’ (for Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton), ‘little Marco’ (for Republican rival Marco Rubio), and ‘Lyin’ Ted’ (for Republican rival Ted Cruz). He even faced the public release of video and audio footage capturing him boasting about how fame enables men to get away with the sexual assault of women. Any one of these factors alone would have sunk previous candidates. Taken together, they would have sunk the *Titanic*. Yet Trump defied them all. Playing on fears about America’s economic decay, and its allegedly porous border with Mexico, he delivered a victory that most scholarly commentators had seen as an electoral impossibility.

In the United Kingdom, the Brexit vote of 2016 delivered its own political earthquake. For decades, the European Union was something countries scrambled to get into rather than out of. So long a symbol of the cosmopolitan benefits of connected globalism, the EU seems to have become something of a victim of its own success by losing touch with some of its more dissatisfied citizens. Nowhere more so than in Britain, where the charismatic figure of Nigel Farage was able to fashion his single-issue United Kingdom Independence Party into a potent force in national debate. In 2016, harnessing a mixed bag of electoral grievances, the ‘leave’ campaign was successful in galvanising a majority of British voters into choosing to take their country out of the EU. The referendum left the country split almost exactly in half, and at the time of writing it is still in the process of stitching itself back together.

We could add to the list the extraordinary campaign of Emmanuel Macron in France, who—in the space of a year—was able to establish a brand new party strong enough to sweep him to victory in both presidential and parliamentary elections in 2017. At the same time, far-right parties are on the rise in Germany, Poland and Hungary, whilst in Italy a political force founded by a professional comedian topped the poll in the 2018 elections. In short, the western political world is in a state of flux as centrist leaders flounder in the face of a growing number of citizens suddenly sceptical of the benefits of moderation.

Of course, any argument that we live in challenging times must not elide into the assertion that this is necessarily unique. Public leadership has always been difficult. Policy challenges have always been complex. And social, economic and technological change is not a new phenomenon. As the work of Stephen Skowronek (2008), and more recently Wes Widmaier (2016), on the cyclical operation of political time has powerfully argued, disruptive moments occur with regularity when we assess politics across a longer historical horizon. For sure the pace of technological change in the twenty-first century is intense. But the same could have been said during the industrial revolution, and then during the advent of the telephone, motor car and air travel. Equally, the idea of popular discontent with current political settings doesn't look so unusual when compared with the protests and upheavals of 1968 in both Europe and America. In other words, large-scale disruption is a much more common occurrence than contemporary critiques might suggest.

Nevertheless, whenever disruption on such a scale does occur it has impacts in unexpected ways. It places new tensions on established modes of governance. In the twenty-first century, it is testing the constitutional and institutional limits through which power is distributed in democratic societies. We have seen that in the United States, where the Trump administration has clashed repeatedly with the courts over travel bans from some Muslim countries. We see it also in Trump's sacking of James Comey as head of the FBI, and in the probe by Special Counsel Robert Mueller into alleged connections between the Trump campaign and Russia. We have seen it in the United Kingdom, where the House of Lords—an unelected chamber—has pushed back hard on aspects of the May government's Brexit strategy. Here too judges have come under intense media fire when reaching decisions unfavourable to Brexit campaigners.

This sense of disruptive dislocation has also had an impact in some of the usually less visible and less contentious areas of government. One such aspect—which provides the focus of this book—is in the relationship between elected leaders and the bureaucracy. Western democracies have spent centuries establishing norms and conventions for how power should be balanced between elected officials and other arms of the state. Do public servants owe their loyalty to the constitution, the parliament, the people, or to the elected leaders who give them instructions? Such questions, once the stuff of dry constitutional scholarship, have re-entered the realm of contentious political debate.

In particular, this book looks at the increasingly *public* nature of arguments between elected representatives and appointed officials. In response

to these ‘abnormal times’ some non-elected bureaucratic heads are challenging the authority of elected leaders by speaking truth to power through very public interventions. They are making use of their platforms to engage in what I characterise as a form of megaphone bureaucracy. In choosing this label I am of course drawing on the well-known term ‘megaphone diplomacy’, which describes those moments when states conduct their international relations through public denouncements rather than quiet back-room discussions. In a similar way, bureaucratic leaders are having to make increasing use of public platforms to promote arguments they might once have made to politicians in more private settings. Figures like James Comey are drawing on the independent authority of their positions to push back against elected representatives. They are using their profiles to challenge democratically elected politicians in the arena of public opinion.

At the other end of the spectrum, some administrators are using that same public stage to more openly support the political positions of the government of the day, leading to accusations of partisanship. When to advise in private and when to upbraid or support in public—these are difficult lines of judgement that non-elected officials are having to walk in increasingly public ways. In the pages that follow I argue that it is both theoretically possible and practically desirable for senior administrators to embrace a greater public voice than our governing traditions have previously allowed.¹ In an age of disruption, full of debates about ‘fake news’, ‘echo chambers’ and distrust of political processes, the wider distribution of authoritative voices in public debate offers important benefits.



Someone didn’t get the memo. As President Donald Trump and the First Lady swayed across the dance floor at three inaugural balls, civil servants at one national agency were getting a dressing-down. Late on 20 January 2017, the Department of the Interior was told to shut down all its official Twitter accounts until further notice. The feed from the National Park Service had a few hours earlier re-tweeted a picture from a *New York Times* reporter which suggested that crowds for Trump’s inauguration were less than for Obama’s eight years before. A second re-tweet had drawn unfavourable attention to the lack of policy content about climate change on the new White House website. Less than twelve hours after the inauguration of a new president, and civil servants had already been reminded of the dangers of publicly wrestling with politics.

Ten days later, the new president signed an executive order closing America's borders to refugees, and to the citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries. Administratively and politically, all hell broke loose. At the nation's airports, officials scurried to play catch-up. In foreign capitals, leaders alternated between hand-wringing, open denunciation, and a considered silence. In Washington, another non-elected official decided to write her own script. Sally Yates was hardly a household name. An Obama appointee, she had simply stayed in place as acting attorney general whilst President Trump's preferred nominee remained embroiled in the contentions of Senate confirmation. Trump took to Twitter to lash the Democrats for holding up his nominee, leaving him stuck with an 'Obama A.G'.

Yates jumped into the national conversation by issuing a statement to her department essentially telling them not to enforce the president's executive order. 'My responsibility', she wrote, 'is to ensure that the position of the Department of Justice is not only legally defensible, but is informed by our best view of what the law is after consideration of all the facts.' She suggested that a law must be assessed on the basis of whether it is 'wise and just'. The White House responded quickly and decisively by relieving Yates of her responsibilities. The language was uncompromising. 'The acting Attorney General, Sally Yates, has betrayed the Department of Justice by refusing to enforce a legal order designed to protect the citizens of the United States.'

On the other side of the Atlantic, the British political establishment had started 2017 by constructing its own piece of theatre. The British ambassador to the EU, Sir Ivan Rogers, had expressed reservations about the British government's approach to striking a Brexit deal, and in early January 2017 he could take it no more. He resigned his commission, but didn't do so quietly. In an email to colleagues which immediately went public, he encouraged them to hold tight in the face of political difficulty. 'I hope you will continue to challenge ill-founded arguments and muddled thinking and that you will never be afraid to speak the truth to those in power. I hope that you will support each other in those difficult moments where you have to deliver messages that are disagreeable to those who need to hear them.' The email caused a media storm of its own and led the news for at least twenty-four hours. And the government returned fire. Former Conservative leader and prominent supporter of Brexit Iain Duncan Smith took Rogers to task for having aired his views in public.

I don't agree that somehow all [Rogers] did was write a little email to various colleagues. He knew very well what he was doing. [He] probably

also knew very well what he was doing when the previous email got leaked—it reeked. It gets to a point when a civil servant starts to go public on stuff that you, as ministers, can no longer trust that individual. You must have absolute trust and cooperation and you cannot have this stuff coming out publicly. (*Daily Express* 2017)

Did Rogers, Yates and the National Park Service do the right thing, or did they cross a line? Did they, as one Democratic advisor asserted of Yates, simply ‘speak truth to power’ (*Guardian* 2017), or did they misjudge their roles as non-elected public officials and wade into partisan political debates that should have been avoided? In the coming pages, this book will ask whether civil servants have a legitimate role to play in public debate, and indeed whether they can avoid publicity in the age of social media when even the president of the United States is not above calling them out on Twitter. And does the alleged responsibility to be discrete only apply to serving officials, or do retired mandarins also retain a higher level of responsibility to exercise their influence privately rather than through public debates?

Civil servants and public executives in modern democracies face extraordinary challenges. Blame games are common (Hood 2010) and fickle political mandates leave them grappling with unclear expectations (Moore 1995; 2013). They face contradictory demands to be innovative and risk-averse at one and the same time. These dilemmas are played out against the background of an unpredictable and unforgiving hyper-partisan political atmosphere. None of these things are necessarily new—civil service leaders have always faced the need to balance politics and policy, and the need to respond to the vagaries of their elected masters. What adds to the degree of difficulty today is that such challenges are wrapped up in an environment of relentless public scrutiny. The defining feature of modern governance in advanced democracies is that it is carried out in the full glare of an unremitting transparency. The traditional private spaces for deliberation and elite interaction that once co-existed with the demands of public debate have been replaced by a type of scrutiny that leaves little room for concealment (Schudson 2015; Vincent 1999). The era of ‘governing in public’ has arrived.²

A key role of civil servants has long been that of ‘speaking truth to power’.³ The phrase itself is most commonly associated with the seminal work of Aaron Wildavsky, who added it to the title of his 1979 book *The Art and Craft of Policy Analysis*. Importantly, for Wildavsky speaking truth to power is not just about presenting facts, but also about ‘persuasive performance’ (1979, 401) whereby policy analysts have to combine the insights from data with

the capacity to persuade decision-makers of its utility. He suggests that ‘the truth we speak is partial. There is always more than one version of the truth and we can be most certain that the latest statement isn’t it’ (1979, 404). So if ‘truth’ is a site of contestation that cannot be resolved by analysis alone, it follows that we need a wider set of authoritative voices willing to provide their take on the ‘truth’ to enable a more informed public debate.

In a twenty-four-hour media world, where there are no hiding places from controversy, what does speaking truth to power look like for public leaders today? Is it to publicly push back when they disagree with government and be willing to fight pitched political battles in defence of their own policy integrity? This book draws on examples from a range of advanced democracies to argue that officials are becoming public figures whether they like it or not, and are having to find ways to defend themselves whilst still protecting their non-partisan status. I argue that the very fact that disagreements are becoming more public means that perceptions of politicisation will follow, leaving administrative leaders with little choice but to defend themselves. I present this not as a dichotomous choice, but rather as an extra variable for senior officials to weigh up when considering how best to serve ministers without compromising their own integrity. Whilst this book of necessity focuses most of its attention on sites of conflict, that does not imply that administrative professionals have lost the ability to work successfully with politicians. As decades of research have shown, senior civil servants are frequently very adept at working with elected leaders in ways that prevent either party being manoeuvred into corners (see for example Rhodes 2011; Hood and Lodge 2006; Weller 2001). But the modern governance environment is making that harder.

In the process of creating and protecting their ‘public face’, leaders are having to grapple with the practical end of three theoretical debates that have been exercising the minds of scholars in the field of public policy and public administration. First, many critics have suggested that civil servants are becoming politicised and are no longer able to stand up to their elected masters successfully (Aucoin 2012; Savoie 2003; 2008; Heintzman 2014). Whilst the pressures are undoubtedly real, this book will argue not only that civil service leaders still retain a high degree of agency, but that the age of social media is providing opportunities to exercise that agency in newly proactive ways.

Second, there continues to be intense debate about the extent to which civil servants should measure their success in terms of the ‘public value’ they are able to generate (Moore 1995; 2013; Rhodes and Wanna 2009). I

will suggest that part of pursuing public value now involves the willingness to ‘go public’, sometimes without the blessing of politicians, and that this changes the risk matrix facing bureaucratic leaders as they calculate how best to build and protect their public face. Third, the ‘discursive turn’ in public policy has demonstrated the importance of ideas, narratives and traditions as driving forces (Stone 2012; Fischer 2003). This book will argue that the ‘public’ nature of the modern governance environment means that modern public executives have become first and foremost communicators of ideas, who must learn to navigate the political minefields that the public communication of those ideas exposes them to. Civil servants and public executives have been pushed out onto the main stage alongside elected politicians—and must perform appropriately.

In facing these challenges, bureaucratic leaders have to work within the confines of the system of government in which they find themselves. For the group of democracies who inherited their political traditions from the United Kingdom—Australia, Canada, New Zealand and many others—the Westminster system presents a different institutional architecture to that facing public officials in the United States. The Westminster system of public administration is based on traditions and conventions; Washington is based on institutional power and legislatively embedded role definitions. Civil servants in both systems start with some advantages—Westminster with strong informal knowledge about how to stay out of trouble and Washington with institutional protection to push back against public criticism. But both also run too easily into difficulty. In Washington, overreach by civil servants leads to highly politicised confrontations, and in Westminster a lack of protective structures leaves mandarins with little solid ground to fall back on when push comes to shove.

Whilst choosing here to focus on arrangements in the USA and ‘Westminster countries’, it is important to note that dilemmas about how best to structure relations between elected leaders and unelected bureaucracies exist in all governmental systems. Each country, in the context of its own cultural and governmental traditions, has shaped its own version of this relationship. From the nuances of the French semi-presidential system (see Suleiman 1974; see Elgie 2014 for semi-presidential systems more widely), to the complexities of working with consociational multi-party systems in much of northern Europe, to local variations of the Westminster inheritance in parts of Asia (see Patapan et al. 2005), senior officials are always iteratively evolving their role in sync with their political executives. Montgomery Van Wart’s (2013) review article on the state of administrative leadership theory

provides an insight into the collective breadth of this work. The full body of research on related aspects of executive government around the globe is too vast to cover here, but it does highlight that there is a need for further comparative work on the changing public face of bureaucracy beyond the jurisdictions covered in this book.⁴

Unlike the UK, the American system of government has long understood that non-elected administrative executives are no less publicly accountable figures than elected politicians. Their role is different, but the style of scrutiny applied to them frequently is not. The leaders of government organisations are expected to publicly advance the interests of their agencies, and advocate on behalf of them, whilst regularly and publicly answering for all aspects of finance and administration. In an era of hyper-partisanship, this kind of public profile has taken on a more sharply visible political edge, leaving administrators exposed to highly politicised public judgements on their performance. Through often extraordinarily combative appearances before congressional committee hearings, and robust interactions with the news media, public executives are finding themselves drawn into political controversies that inhibit their capacity to perform as non-partisan administrators.

In countries that operate under the Westminster system of government, the institutions, traditions and conventions that underpin the power of civil servants are fundamentally different. The architecture of the Westminster system of public administration reflects the circumstances in which it was conceived in the mid-nineteenth century. For much of the last 150 years, communications between ministers and civil servants were conducted through internal documents and memos, or direct private conversations, without public scrutiny of the processes involved (see Hennessy 1989; Lowe 2011). They were ‘privileged’ conversations in every sense of the term. Parliamentary scrutiny of the executive occurred on the floor of the House of Commons rather than through the questioning of officials by parliamentary committees. Newspaper coverage could be harsh, and satire abounded, but it was focused on the visible manifestations of policy rather than investigating and prying into the processes which made government tick.

In the twenty-first century, this private world has given way to a new paradigm—‘governing in public’. The relentless emphasis on transparency and accountability means that all government actors must be ready to be ‘public’ actors whenever the situation demands. As Rod Rhodes has recently asserted, based on an ethnographic study, ‘nowadays senior civil servants speak in public almost as often as ministers’ (2011, 9). Civil servants are finding that their increased public profile is leading to accusations that they

are becoming politicised partisans rather than the objective instruments of good government (see Savoie 2003; 2008). This can extend even to the traditionally most secretive arms of the state. For example, in the UK the head of the Joint Intelligence Committee before the Iraq war, John Scarlett, found himself pulled into the public eye by the Hutton inquiry in 2003. The inquiry focused on the case of Dr David Kelly, a government scientist found dead at his home after having been publicly outed as the source for BBC news stories. The stories had questioned the veracity of the intelligence dossier on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction that had been used to justify the UK's decision to go to war—a dossier which Scarlett had been heavily involved in producing. Scarlett's appearance at the inquiry drew intense media interest and made him a public figure. Alastair Campbell noted in his diaries of the time how hard this must have been for Scarlett: 'It must be dreadful for someone whose entire life has been about secrets, and dependent on staying low profile, now to be so out there in the public domain' (Campbell 2007, 746).

In the United States, institutional structures and governance traditions mean the challenges of public leadership are shaped differently. To begin with, thousands of leadership positions change with each new administration. The practice recognises that bureaucracies have a central role to play in implementing the policies and furthering the interests of the elected president (see Lewis 2008). Once appointed, the Hatch Act ensures that pursuit of the president's policy programme does not morph into openly partisan advocacy of a political agenda. Leaders are appointed to roles in which their responsibilities are frequently defined by statute, providing them in theory with protections against accusations of overstepping their boundaries. They also take on a high degree of personal responsibility for the organisation that they come to lead, and are able to adopt a style of leadership that unashamedly promotes and defends specific policy decisions. If mistakes are made, those administrative leaders are expected to take responsibility alongside their political masters. This juxtaposes starkly against Westminster tradition, where the doctrine of ministerial responsibility to parliament means that ministers are the public face of their departments, and it is they who are expected to take the blame for any blunders that emerge on their watch (Kitson Clark 1959).

The challenge for US administrators is that in assuming such a public style of responsibility for how they exercise their leadership, they are finding themselves drawn into the midst of an increasingly polarised and politicised governance environment. Without the protection of Westminster traditions

of anonymity, or of permanency of tenure at the upper levels, US administrators are left with little choice but to fight bitter public battles in defence of their decision-making. Their ostensibly administrative role can all too easily become a highly politicised flashpoint for public political disagreements. So how did it come to this? I turn now to briefly outline the transition from governing in private to governing in public in both the UK and the USA.

Emerging from Anonymity

I consciously tried not to take a public place . . . I believe in the faceless bureaucrat; I believe in it deeply. (Former Canadian permanent secretary, author interview, 2015)

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, private spaces formed one of the central underpinnings of the governance environment on both sides of the Atlantic. Political and administrative actors alike were not inclined to take the public into their confidence about the more intricate aspects of governing. As the academic Jeffrey Tulis asserts of US presidents, '[p]rior to this century, presidents preferred written communications between the branches of government to oral addresses to "the people"' (Tulis 1987, 5). A wide series of changes over the last forty years has transformed this world of governing in private to one of governing in public. Elements such as freedom of information, scrutiny by oversight committees, social media, network governance and 24/7 news media have not only re-defined modern government, but importantly have turned administrative leaders into public actors in new ways.

THE WESTMINSTER STORY

Democracy was seen as a very dangerous idea in mid-Victorian Britain. The thought that the processes of government were things to be debated in public—so that people could exercise their preferences at the ballot box—was one that caused intense disquiet amongst much of the governing class. Benjamin Disraeli wrote in his 1870 novel *Lothair* that 'the world is weary of statesmen whom democracy has degraded into politicians'. The future Lord Salisbury lamented in an 1860 piece for the *Quarterly Review* that 'wherever democracy has prevailed, the power of the State has been used in some form or other to plunder the well-to-do classes for the benefit of the poor'. The Whig prime minister Lord Palmerston asserted that

The Truth is that a vote is not a *Right* but a *Trust*. All the Nation cannot by Possibility be brought together to vote and therefore a Selected few are appointed by Law to perform this Function for the Rest and the Publicity attached to the Performance of this Trust is a Security that it will be responsibly performed. (1864 letter to Charles Barrington, cited in Ridley 1970, 565.)

The world of nineteenth-century British government was a world of elites. Even whilst powerful external forces—from Chartism to Irish separatism to organised labour—periodically pushed their way into the political consciousness of the nation, their proximity to the levers of power remained very much at arm's length. Whig aristocrats, Tory landed gentry, philosophical liberals and even some emerging radicals all shared a similar trajectory to the halls of power. Theirs was an ascendancy forged in the drawing rooms of great houses, the public schools of Eton, Harrow and Winchester, the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge and the secluded corners of London's gentlemen's clubs. It was in this environment that the conventions, traditions and institutions of the Westminster system of government were given their modern shape.

The Northcote-Trevelyan report of 1854 is still widely hailed as the birth certificate of the modern civil service in the United Kingdom, and by extension also of the civil service in its former dominions in Australia, Canada and New Zealand. The report itself was a surprisingly short and didactic piece of political advocacy masquerading as objective analysis, but its influence remains substantial. In its nineteen pages of flowing prose, it set out the foundations of a merit-based employment system, and suggested a division of labour between the monotony of clerical work and the more cerebral activities of policymaking. Importantly for modern arguments about politicisation, what it most certainly did not advocate was an 'apolitical' civil service that should operate in the shadows. Sir Stafford Northcote, Sir Charles Trevelyan and their contemporaries were in many ways policy entrepreneurs, men with strong political opinions who frequently sought to shape the administrative and policy worlds in very public ways. Over time, that aspect of their history has given way to the embrace of public anonymity as a cornerstone of civil service identity.

For more than a century, Trevelyan's successors at the head of the UK civil service matched his level of engagement in the work of government, but were more circumspect in choosing the moments when they would expose themselves to public scrutiny. Permanent secretaries such as Edward

Bridges, Warren Fisher, Percival Waterfield, Evelyn Sharp, Otto Clarke, Norman Brook and Burke Trend were towering figures who wielded great power, but were careful to do so only at the edges of the public consciousness. An excellent composite biographical study of many of these figures by Theakston (1999) confirms that the natural discretion of mandarins often belied what was in reality a wide engagement with the world beyond Whitehall.

Across this era, there were of course some notable exceptions to the prevailing tendency towards anonymity. John Maynard Keynes was able to combine the role of government adviser with that of public intellectual, and his *Economic Consequences of the Peace* was an extraordinarily influential bestseller in the immediate aftermath of World War One. During World War Two, Robert Vansittart—having recently retired as permanent under-secretary of foreign affairs—penned a book entitled *Black Record: Germans Past and Present*, strongly supporting the government's war efforts. Outside of the extraordinary exigencies of war time, perhaps the most notable transition figure between anonymity and the embrace of a more public face was William Armstrong, head of the home civil service in the pivotal years of the early 1970s. The British National Archives hold a fascinating set of files containing transcripts and speeches associated with Armstrong's many TV appearances and interviews in this period.⁵

Following the exhortation of the 1968 Fulton report for the civil service to be more open and outward-facing, Armstrong personified exactly this new style of leadership. In a public lecture of 1970, he explicitly addressed the need for civil servants to be seen as less remote from the people they serve.

One way of picturing the remoteness people feel about Government—especially if they are coming to believe that the aspect of Government which affects them most is in the hands of civil servants—is to call them ' mandarins ', to picture them as isolated beings ruling as it were an alien population—to demand their appearance in public, their submission to public scrutiny, their public accountability: there is also a demand that they should not be in any way different—they should be 'of us'—a sort of cross-section of the community as a whole, suffering at all points as we do.⁶

Such was Armstrong's influence in the Heath government that he was known colloquially as the 'deputy prime minister'. The strains of office also led him to suffer a quite spectacular nervous breakdown, the details of which were revealed by former Labour adviser and minister Bernard Donoghue in volume two of his *Downing Street Diary*.

In facing the pressures of administrative leadership, most twentieth-century mandarins had two key advantages not easily available to contemporary civil service leaders today. First, they worked more closely in concert with ministers, who were more willing to see their civil servants as executive partners rather than road-blocks to be manoeuvred out of the way. Second, their behaviour was not subjected to the same intensity of public scrutiny that modern mandarins face. Cabinet secretaries like Norman Brook and Burke Trend were certainly not wilting violets who chose to be largely anonymous out of a lack of self-confidence. They were every bit as frank and fearless in their advice as Charles Trevelyan was in his, but they largely offered their analysis in the privacy behind closed doors. They flourished at a time of a 'consensual conservative approach to bureaucracy' (Greenaway 1992), in which an elite mandarin was seen as being of a piece with the political class it served. Coinciding with a long period of majority governments from 1924 to 1974, there was a general stability around the roles expected of senior civil servants.

By maintaining a low public profile, mandarins insulated themselves from the public assessments of those who might have wished to critique their advice as evidence of some kind of politicisation. In keeping with conceptions of the traditional public sector bargain (see Hood and Lodge 2006), this also guaranteed that public accountability remained with ministers rather than officials. Civil service leaders are meant to have strong views, and the confidence to take them up with their minister. The successful working of the Westminster system relies upon it. But now, mandarins are also having to engage far more widely with the world beyond government departments. In a governing environment characterised increasingly by hybrid forms of collaboration between government and non-government actors, civil servants have had to reach out to try and persuade people over whom they have no direct hierarchical authority. Instead of simply pulling levers in Whitehall (not that it was ever that simple), they need to engage in public outreach to guide, cajole and motivate others. And they need to do all of this transparently, with government departments recalibrated to look outwards and be more 'open' to the people they serve. This forced relinquishment of anonymity has drawn civil service leaders into the public domain, and created room for allegations of politicisation to emerge from critics willing to frame their words as a political defence of government policy.

This link between anonymity and perceived breaches of impartiality creates a difficult balancing act for current senior civil servants who are exhorted to be more open and engaged with the community, only to then be

excoriated for alleged ‘politicisation’ if their remarks are seen as too close to ministers. Should they go the other way and openly criticise the decisions of ministers, political displeasure quickly follows. It’s a conundrum that was recognised but not resolved in the 1960s by the Fulton report, which argued that the risks in reducing anonymity were outweighed by the benefits:

The argument of the preceding paragraphs has important implications for the traditional anonymity of civil servants. It is already being eroded by Parliament and to a more limited extent by the pressures of the press, radio and television; the process will continue and we see no reason to seek to reverse it . . . We do not under-estimate the risks involved in such a change. It is often difficult to explain without also appearing to argue; however impartially one presents the facts, there will always be those who think that the presentation is biased . . . We believe that this will have to be faced and that Ministers and M.P.s should take a tolerant view of the civil servant who inadvertently steps out of line. (Fulton 1968, paras. 283–4)

As discussed in subsequent chapters, contemporary evidence suggests that ministers and MPs are not necessarily predisposed to taking a ‘tolerant view of the civil servant who inadvertently steps out of line’.

THE VIEW FROM WASHINGTON

A nation that rests on the will of the people must also depend on individuals to support its institutions in whatever ways are appropriate if it is to flourish. Persons qualified for public office should feel some obligation to make that contribution. (Thomas Jefferson)

Thomas Jefferson was a great believer in civic duty. The talents of men who had talent to share should be placed at the feet of their fellow citizens. This did not mean that he embraced modern ideals of a meritocratic civil service. Administrative traditions in the USA may not have emerged from the gentrified corridors of Whitehall, but were in many ways no less patrician and no more openly democratic. Nineteenth-century America faced the same issues of excessive patronage, individual empire building and capacity gaps that had led to the Northcote-Trevelyan report in the UK. In what Carpenter (2001) describes as the ‘clerical state’, US bureaucracy was seen as an unimaginative keeper of official records rather than a positive force for change.

Just as civil service reform in the UK relied on the driving energy of Charles Trevelyan, so too did US reform rely on the consistent advocacy of George W. Curtis. A writer, editor of *Harper's Weekly*, staunch Republican, and president of the National Civil Service Reform Association, Curtis was appointed by President Grant to chair his 1871 Civil Service Commission. Despite Grant's initial backing, the move for reform was undermined by a group of Republicans who favoured maintaining a form of the spoils system as a way of rewarding followers. It took the assassination of President Garfield by an unsuccessful civil service jobseeker to create the political will necessary to allow the passage of the 1883 Pendleton Act. The Act laid the groundwork for meritocratic appointments based on a civil service exam, established the Civil Service Commission on a more permanent footing, and contained measures to protect the tenure of employees from political interference.

In the UK, it took many decades for the ideas outlined in the Northcote-Trevelyan report to find their way into both law and practice. Similarly in the USA, the Pendleton Act may have laid the groundwork to reform segments of the federal bureaucracy but it took many further decades for those reforms to spread across all agencies, and further afield into State civil services. What the Act did not do was institute any greater degree of transparency into government decision-making. Civil servants may have slowly grown more secure in their employment, but that security was never intended to translate into a more democratic form of public engagement.

There is, however, a long tradition in American public administration of leaders willing to act as administrative entrepreneurs, building their own profile in tandem with the profile of the agency that they lead. What has grown over the last century is the tendency to take that profile to a much more public stage. Scholars such as Eugene Lewis, Erwin C. Hargrove and Philip Selznick have all helped enormously in expanding our understanding of how agency leadership has changed in the US over that time. Collectively, their research has restored some sense of purposive agency to the role of administrative leaders, even amidst institutional and structural constraints. For instance, Lewis's 1980 study highlights the examples of Hyman Rickover in the US navy, J. Edgar Hoover at the FBI and Robert Moses in New York to show that determined administrative leadership by public entrepreneurs inevitably leads to a high public profile and towards the exercise of a form of political power from unelected office. Such men were able to 'weaponise' what Lewis terms their 'apolitical shield' by making a virtue of resisting political pressure at the same time as engaging in heavily political acts themselves.

The USA's shift towards governing in public in many ways mirrors that of the United Kingdom in temporal terms, despite starting from quite different institutional traditions. As described by Michael Schudson (2015), the embrace from the 1950s onwards of an open government agenda reflected the idea that citizens in a democracy have a fundamental right to know what their government is up to. Landmark moments such as the passage of the Freedom of Information Act in 1966 interacted with forces outside of government itself as a more educated and curious populace began to demand more knowledge about just what their representatives were doing on their behalf. This included not just their political representatives, but also those administrators charged with implementing everything from racial integration to environmental protection. The result was a more outward-facing governance style, which has continued to expand up to the present day. Concomitantly, in an environment characterised by hyper-partisanship, this means that public executives can find their roles overtaken by political contention, with a commensurate impact on their ability to exercise their office independently and objectively.

The Public Face of the Modern Mandarin

The behaviour and leadership approach of Victorian civil service leaders like Charles Trevelyan serves as a reminder that the Westminster system has always been fluid. Conventions and traditions have evolved over time. The emergence of mandarins as increasingly public figures in the twenty-first century may represent a break with recent tradition, but that does not mean that the Westminster system is suddenly broken. Evolution involves change, but it is always change built on what was there before. Those modern mandarins who speak out in public debates have not suddenly abandoned their commitment to Westminster traditions of impartiality. Their willing emergence from anonymity has not translated into a willing embrace of partisanship. But the public nature of their modern role means that *perceptions* of partisanship are now perhaps harder to control than they were previously.

In the United States, as the departments of state grew larger from the turn of the twentieth century onwards, so too did the power and authority wielded by both their political masters and their non-elected leaders. This is not necessarily a bad thing, as the scholarship of John Rohr (1986; 1995; 2002) in particular has demonstrated. Strong public leadership by administrators is not *ipso facto* an example of over-reach that undermines democracy. On the contrary, Rohr has argued that public administrators in the US draw their

legitimacy directly from the constitution itself, and that their first allegiance is to faithfully follow the dictates of the constitution rather than blindly following the orders of politicians. He suggests that '[a]dministration is political; but like the judiciary, it has its own style of politics and its distinctive functions within the constitutional order' (1986, 184). For Rohr, public administrators have a responsibility to maintain a sense of their own independent authority, which must then be exercised cautiously in the face of political realities. At the same time, he acknowledges the pressures that have been placed on the Senior Executive Service in the US to be more politically responsive since the passage of the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 (1995, 257).

As Selznick observed as long ago as 1957, the US system of government to some extent *relies* on non-elected public figures taking a prominent place in national leadership. He suggested that 'they have become increasingly *public* in nature, attached to such interests and dealing with such problems as affect the welfare of the entire community' (1957, 1–2). So American public executives of today are certainly building on a long legacy. Unlike their Westminster-system counterparts, their emergence onto the public stage has been less dramatic, because traditions of anonymity in American public administration have never run as deep.

Much of the recent scholarly work on administrative leadership has emphasised that it needs to be studied as part of the wider world of public leadership as a whole, rather than as something separate from the political domain (see Ospina 2016; 't Hart 2014). All public leaders—elected or not—face the same challenge of asserting authority within the complex world of transparent, fast-paced decision-making under the unforgiving gaze of voters. As Rhodes (2014, 112–13) explains, 'administrative leadership is about the constitutional and political role of public administration in the polity; it is not just about better management'. In other words, senior bureaucrats are not simply functionaries in a Weberian machine, but agents contributing their part to the wider task of public leadership and the search for some form of public value (see Crosby and Bryson 2005; 2017).

What is making that task more difficult for today's cohort of officials is the combined magnifying effect of a hyper-vigilant uncivil media looking for mistakes (see Mutz 2015), and the lack of private spaces to engage in any kind of reflective decision-making. The speed of government makes reflection difficult. Modern bureaucratic leaders have to walk a precarious public path between serving the government of the day and protecting their reputation as non-partisan administrators. Through their speeches, their social media outreach and their public appearances, they are engaging in acts of public

persuasion—both about what they and their departments are doing, and about what the policy challenges are that governments will have to address in the short, medium and longer term. They have become public rhetoricians who once only whispered to their political masters behind the scenes and must now join them out on the front stage. And where necessary, they are quite prepared to defend themselves from political attack in the process.

The twenty-first century thrives on communication. Information is ubiquitous, as are the opinions of anyone able to master a computer sufficiently to engage on Twitter, Facebook or YouTube (to name just a few). In this world, the powerful are those who are best able to harness communications technology to persuade the public. The discursive turn in public policy captures the extent to which the business of public administration in the twenty-first century is less about the trading of influence based on interests, and more about the trading of ideas in a communications marketplace. The successful policy entrepreneurs are the ones who can persuade successfully using the full Aristotelian rhetorical toolset.

The transparency and accountability requirements of modern government have seen senior public executives held more rigorously and more publicly to account through forums like congressional or parliamentary committee hearings. These appearances in turn have received coverage through the voracious appetite of the 24/7 news media, boosting the profile of the public servants involved. Secondly, the complexities of network governance have seen these leaders engage with a wider range of groups in a wider range of forums than was traditionally the case. Speeches at these engagement events are often—through the advances of social media—made publicly available for critics and commentators to reflect upon.

American public executives are perhaps more used to carrying a higher degree of individual responsibility for mistakes than their Westminster counterparts, who in theory at least enjoy the protection provided by the ministerial responsibility doctrine. When the BP oil spill disaster hit in the Gulf of Mexico, it was Elizabeth Birnbaum—the head of the US Minerals Management Service (MMS)—who took public responsibility for regulation failures by resigning. President Obama and his cabinet appointees expressed displeasure at a range of failings by BP and by federal agencies, but no cabinet-level executive had to accept responsibility and resign, and Minister of the Interior Ken Salazar continued in post.

The public nature of contemporary civil service leadership becomes most apparent when it involves politically contentious policy questions. The line between appropriate ‘responsiveness’ and inappropriate ‘politicisation’ is

a deeply contested one (see Mulgan 2008). When it comes to the public behaviour of civil servants, what can be termed ‘functional politicisation’ (Hustedt and Salomonsen 2014) can be measured by the degree to which loyalty to the government of the day spills over into a more enthusiastic advocacy for its inherently partisan policy positions.

Where the former stops and the latter starts is inevitably a question of perception. For example, in the UK in 2013 Cabinet Secretary Jeremy Heywood and Head of the Civil Service Bob Kerslake were accused of partisanship for writing a newspaper opinion piece on the occasion of Margaret Thatcher’s death which some Labour MP’s saw as too supportive of the former prime minister. When FBI director James Comey stated that he was re-opening his investigation into Hillary Clinton’s emails in October 2016, Democrat politicians suggested that he’d violated the Hatch Act’s prohibition on officials influencing elections. In Australia in mid-2014, Treasury Secretary Martin Parkinson was perceived as having criticised the Labor opposition with his remarks in a speech critiquing those who relied on ‘vague notions of fairness’ in attacking the government’s budget (Parkinson 2014; Bourke 2014). There is little to suggest that any of these figures were being deliberately partisan, but there can be little doubt that all three made profoundly ‘political’ interventions.

Such incidents have fed the concerns of scholarly critics (e.g., Aucoin 2012; Savoie 2008) who argue that civil services have become increasingly politicised in partisan ways, and that this is reflected in the roles that senior civil servants are prepared to play in public. One of the strongest critiques is from the late Peter Aucoin, who asserted that traditional boundaries in Westminster-system countries like Canada were breaking down.

The anonymity of public servants, as invisible to parliament or the public, disappeared some time ago. In the environment of N[ew] P[olitical] G[overnance], moreover, ministers, sometimes explicitly, usually implicitly, expect those public servants who are seen and heard in countless public forums to support government policy, that is, to go beyond mere description and explanation . . . The expectation is not that they engage in the partisan political process, for example, at elections or political rallies. Rather, it is that they be promiscuously or serially partisan, that is, to be the agents of the government of the day in relation to stakeholders, organized interests, citizens, media, and parliamentarians as they engage in consultations, service delivery, media communications, reporting to parliament, and appearing before parliamentary committees. (Aucoin 2012, 189)

In other words, according to Aucoin, the politicisation of civil servants is reflected in their willingness to toe uncritically a government line in public forums with business, interest groups and the like.⁷ The counter-argument of course is that it has always been the role of civil servants to serve the executive government of the day. The difference, arguably, is that translating that type of service from a private to a public forum results in increased *perceptions* of politicisation, even if in reality civil servants are only loyally supporting the government of the day as they have always done. Equally, when civil servants dare to provide something less than immediate and full-throated support for government policies, they can very quickly find themselves under fire from the government that they serve. The very nature of public engagement means that it is hard for individual actors to control the way their interventions might be perceived. As former Australian mandarin Peter Shergold notes, publicly explaining policy decisions ‘could, of course, easily be perceived to be spruiking [promoting] their virtue’ (Shergold 2014, 86).

So what’s the answer? In the following chapter I propose and develop a ‘Washminster’ model for the conscious construction of leaders’ ‘public faces’ in ways that allow them to speak truth to power effectively. The term ‘Washminster’ was originally coined in Australia to describe its hybrid political institutions. With an elected senate based on the US model, a lower house based on the British House of Commons and a written constitution, Australia’s political make-up reflected the influence of both British and American structures. Elaine Thompson initiated the term in her influential 1980 article ‘The “Washminster” Mutation’. It has also recently been used by Felicity Matthews and Matthew Flinders (2015) to capture the growing importance of parliamentary committees in British government. I use it here to develop a new and broader conceptualisation of the ways in which administrative leaders on both sides of the Atlantic and beyond are balancing the competing demands of building a public profile without themselves becoming politicised.

By marrying the nuances of Westminster conventions with the institutionalised boldness of Washington practice, a Washminster model acknowledges that the work of public executives will always involve ‘political’ aspects. As many theorists across the social sciences have now shown, the line between public and private has become blurred to the point of non-existence in many aspects of community life. Politics and public policy are no different. The successful forging of a resilient public face capable of standing up to political power relies on leaders being willing essentially to ignore the distinction between private and public. Speaking truth to power and speaking

truth to the wider public need to be viewed as one and the same activity. Where once it was possible to run dual messages—one for the political ear and one for wider consumption—this is now no longer consistent with the demands of ‘governing in public’.

Drawing on the New Zealand case, I argue here for an approach that recognises the heads of public agencies as exercising an independent public voice in political debate, based on the expertise that resides in the organisations that they lead. Public leadership should be exercised in a determinedly non-partisan way, but without any unrealistic expectation that this will in and of itself allow bureaucratic leaders to stay out of political contention. In an atmosphere of hyper-partisanship, politics is not a variable capable of being modelled out of the way, and must instead be built into the heart of structures of public leadership. As expressed by one former New Zealand departmental permanent secretary, ‘I think you have a role as a chief executive not only to represent your department but also to help inform that debate and help—again in a non-political way—but maybe correct information that’s out there that may be strongly misleading’ (author interview, New Zealand, 2016).

But this does not mean the embrace of some kind of political free-for-all in which every bureaucrat conceives it their job to simply fight their corner against all comers. It relies rather on a nuanced appreciation of the many varieties of public face now required of agency heads. Some forays into the public domain are of necessity politically edgy, whereas many are simply routine. In Figure 1, I characterise public interaction as either proactive or

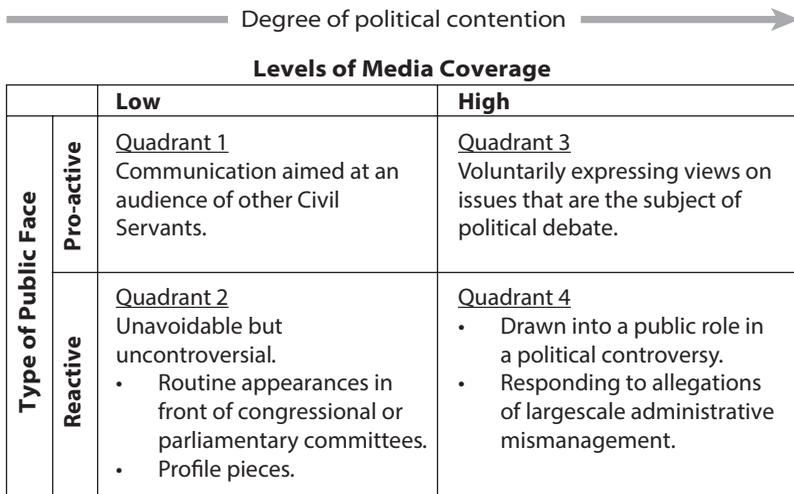


FIGURE 1. Proactive and reactive public leadership

reactive, and then set those categories against the degree of media coverage likely to result. The degree of political tension rises with the degree of media coverage. Each quadrant requires its own strategy for public executives and civil servants as they manage their public face. Figure 1 is intended to capture and conceptualise current practice, rather than providing a prescription. An examination of the ways in which these practices might be encapsulated into a more normatively desirable ‘Washminster’ approach is set out in chapter two.

QUADRANT 1

The kinds of public communication that fall within quadrant 1 are those which are intended primarily for internal audiences. In all democratic countries, senior civil servants engage widely with their peers to learn from each other’s mistakes and to emulate each other’s successes. The kinds of interaction can range from traditional—in the form of a speech to a small group of colleagues in a closed session with the transcript later becoming available—through to innovative uses of modern technology. An example of the latter was Bob Kerslake’s willingness as head of the UK civil service to answer questions in real time through live web chats. Whilst this attracted some media coverage, it was undoubtedly low-level and overwhelmingly positive—with some of the coverage coming from the pen of Kerslake himself (e.g., Kerslake 2012). It self-evidently did not involve high-level risks of political contention.

QUADRANT 2

Quadrant 2 embraces the public appearances and communications that agency heads may not necessarily make of their own volition, but that are nevertheless required of them as part of their formal role. For example, as accounting officers responsible for the financial management of their departments, departmental permanent secretaries in the UK are regularly required to appear in front of the Public Accounts Committee of the House of Commons. Similarly in the Australian context, secretaries often find themselves appearing in front of Senate Estimates Committees. The majority of such appearances could be considered ‘routine’ in terms of their wider interest to the public and any controversy that might ensue.

The exceptions occur when there is an area of activity that has become the subject of either a political row or allegations of gross administrative mismanagement. On such occasions, cases move from the routine nature of

quadrant 2 to the contested and confrontational nature of quadrant 4. Other examples of quadrant 2 publicity include the kind of profile pieces that often accompany the arrival of a new leader in a key role. For example, when Scott Pruitt's appointment as the incoming head of the EPA was confirmed by the Trump administration, journalists naturally sought to do profile pieces on where he might take the EPA under his leadership. Writing in *The Wall Street Journal*, Kimberley Strassel (2017) positioned Pruitt as someone determined to keep the EPA focused on its core business. She quotes Pruitt as saying, 'Agencies exist to administer the law. Congress passes statutes, and those statutes are very clear on the job EPA has to do. We're going to do that job.' The interview presented an opportunity for Pruitt to frame his priorities for leadership, whilst being careful to avoid weighing into controversies about President Trump's first weeks in office. Many bureaucratic leaders only wearily accept this new kind of media intrusion. As one UK former secretary noted, 'Of course the media now like personalities. They will talk about civil servants when the cabinet secretary comes to be renewed and Jeremy Heywood eventually retires, there will be 'runners and riders' stories and all that kind of fluff. You know, it's really trivial and it's very tiresome for the people concerned but you can't really stop it' (author interview, United Kingdom, 2014).

QUADRANT 3

The third quadrant focuses on those occasions in which public executives and senior civil servants proactively enter the public domain, but do so in an area or on an issue that is the subject of contemporary political debate. The political saliency of the issues being covered lead to greater media interest and coverage of any remarks, with commentators keenly looking for evidence of a leader either being at odds with government policy, or of making comments that could be interpreted through a political lens. For example, in 2010 President Obama sacked General Stanley McChrystal, the US commander in Afghanistan, because of comments he'd made to a journalist which formed the basis for a cover story in *Rolling Stone* magazine (Hastings 2010). McChrystal had aired criticisms of the President's national security team, of Vice President Joe Biden, and by extension of the way that President Obama was conducting policy in Afghanistan.

In a way, this is the type of political controversy most easily avoided by bureaucratic leaders simply by exercising their discretion in such a way as not to get involved. Leaders make choices, and this includes choices about

which policy battles they want to get involved in. But increasingly that sense of choice is an illusory one. Any policy issue in which an agency has a stake becomes one on which the media will come asking for a viewpoint. Sometimes refusing to offer a public view itself becomes the story, interpreted as being for or against the government policy in question. And secondly, as the line between private and public advice becomes blurred in an age of transparency, the privately expressed views of leaders are frequently leaked anyway.

Current views amongst former permanent secretaries in the UK and Australia are split between support for proactive engagement, and for trying to avoid public comment altogether. Said one UK mandarin, 'I think what you need is a proactive role which is how you manage the response to the 24/7 media and what information, how you put a context in it' (UK former secretary, author interview, 2014). This contrasted to one Australian's view: 'I never felt that I should be the one commenting. I wasn't the elected official . . . I mean, they're elected and they have the responsibility in my view to make the public comment' (author interview, Australia, 2015).

QUADRANT 4

Quadrant 4 is perhaps the most difficult terrain for public executives and civil servants to traverse. It encompasses aspects of their role that they cannot choose to avoid or downplay, because it covers scenarios that are inherently reactive rather than proactive in nature. This is where crises and blunders are played out in the public spotlight, with administrative decision-making being examined in areas of high public interest. This can involve reacting to decisions made by politicians, or to a disaster that suddenly drags an agency into the spotlight. For example, in 2005 Hurricane Katrina wreaked havoc in New Orleans, immediately putting the Federal Emergency Management Authority (FEMA) in the eye of its own media storm. FEMA head Michael Brown became the focus for intense criticism during the immediate response operation, and then in subsequent combative appearances in front of committees of inquiry in the aftermath of the disaster.

Equally, agency heads can find themselves drawn into controversy because of the political nature of the things they are asked to do. For example, UK Cabinet Secretary Jeremy Heywood was heavily criticised by a House of Commons select committee in 2013 for his handling of an investigation into allegations that the then government chief whip, Andrew Mitchell, had called policemen 'plebs' at the gates of 10 Downing Street. The committee's report received wide publicity with its criticisms reported in all sections of

the British press. It suggested that Heywood should have been more diligent in questioning the veracity of the allegation itself and investigating whether Mitchell may have been unfairly targeted. *The Sun* ran a story under the headline ‘Pleb botcher: Cabinet Secretary rapped over duff probe’ (Newton Dunn 2013), with further unflattering coverage in *The Guardian* (e.g., Watt 2013; see also Wintour 2012) and *The Daily Telegraph* (e.g., Mason 2013a).

Modern public executives and senior civil servants have a complicated relationship with the public gaze. They recognise that in an age of transparency and accountability, with a 24/7 news cycle, the level of anonymity that their profession once enjoyed cannot reasonably endure. But as professionals of long experience in public administration, they are rightly wary of being drawn into becoming figureheads for governments in ways that politicise them. They are fully aware of the ways that their image can potentially be manipulated by politicians. As one UK former secretary noted, ‘what they wanted to do is to use me as a figure of propriety in their support’ (author interview, United Kingdom, 2014). The same secretary reflected on what can happen to civil servants who find themselves in the media limelight—‘I think you don’t become politicised, but you become damaged.’

Media scrutiny offers powerful opportunities for public executives and senior civil servants to define the boundaries of their role simply by being willing to stick their head above the parapet. By being willing to give public speeches, mandarins are asserting by their actions that a system doesn’t have to be opaque in order to be impartial. Equally, the way that they respond in front of congressional and parliamentary committees draws the public lines for what these leaders perceive as being their duty and those things that are seen as beyond the pale. Through these public acts, mandarins are continuously writing and re-writing the institutional boundaries and traditions that define what it means to exercise leadership in twenty-first century government.

The careers of nineteenth-century luminaries like Charles Trevelyan in the UK and George Curtis in the US demonstrate how one could be noisy, risky, even controversial, and still be a widely respected public figure. That is no mean feat, although if anything the task has become even more difficult for contemporary mandarins who may wish to adopt a similar approach. It is arguable that the twenty-first century governance environment, with its focus on transparency, accountability and delivery—all under the watchful eye of the 24/7 media—is not likely to be as forgiving of public service leaders who pursue goals with a single-minded indifference to the views of critics. Allegations of partisanship are easier to make than they are to refute.

But in embracing opportunities for ‘public’ leadership, today’s public executives and senior civil servants are demonstrating the kind of skills necessary to operate in a governance environment in which public persuasion is a growing part of their role. It’s bureaucracy, but not as we know it. It’s ‘bureaucracy with a megaphone’, allowing the voices of officials to reach far beyond the ears of ministers to a wider audience of citizens themselves. This is different from embracing technocracy—I am not suggesting that non-elected officials know best. Democratically elected leaders must continue to be the final decision-makers if citizens are to maintain confidence in the democratic system, and institutions are to avoid falling prey to a ‘democratic deficit’ argument (see Flinders 2011). What a full embrace of ‘governing in public’ does mean is that non-elected officials are able to add an authoritative voice to public debates, to help citizens make up their own minds in differentiating between fake news, ‘facts’ and rhetorical hyperbole.

In the next chapter, I set out how a ‘Washminster’ approach to public leadership might help bureaucratic heads conceptualise what it is they are now having to do as outward-facing leaders. I also lay out the ways in which such an approach might naturally emerge from existing political science theories about institutions, rhetoric and public value. Subsequent chapters then chart a course through the many forms of public engagement that leaders are now confronted with. From communicating in writing with new audiences, to appearing in front of oversight committees, and to wrestling with social media, I examine current practice and potential ways forward. I conclude by outlining a spectrum of public actions available to adventurous modern mandarins as they continue to walk the fine line between public service and political catastrophe.